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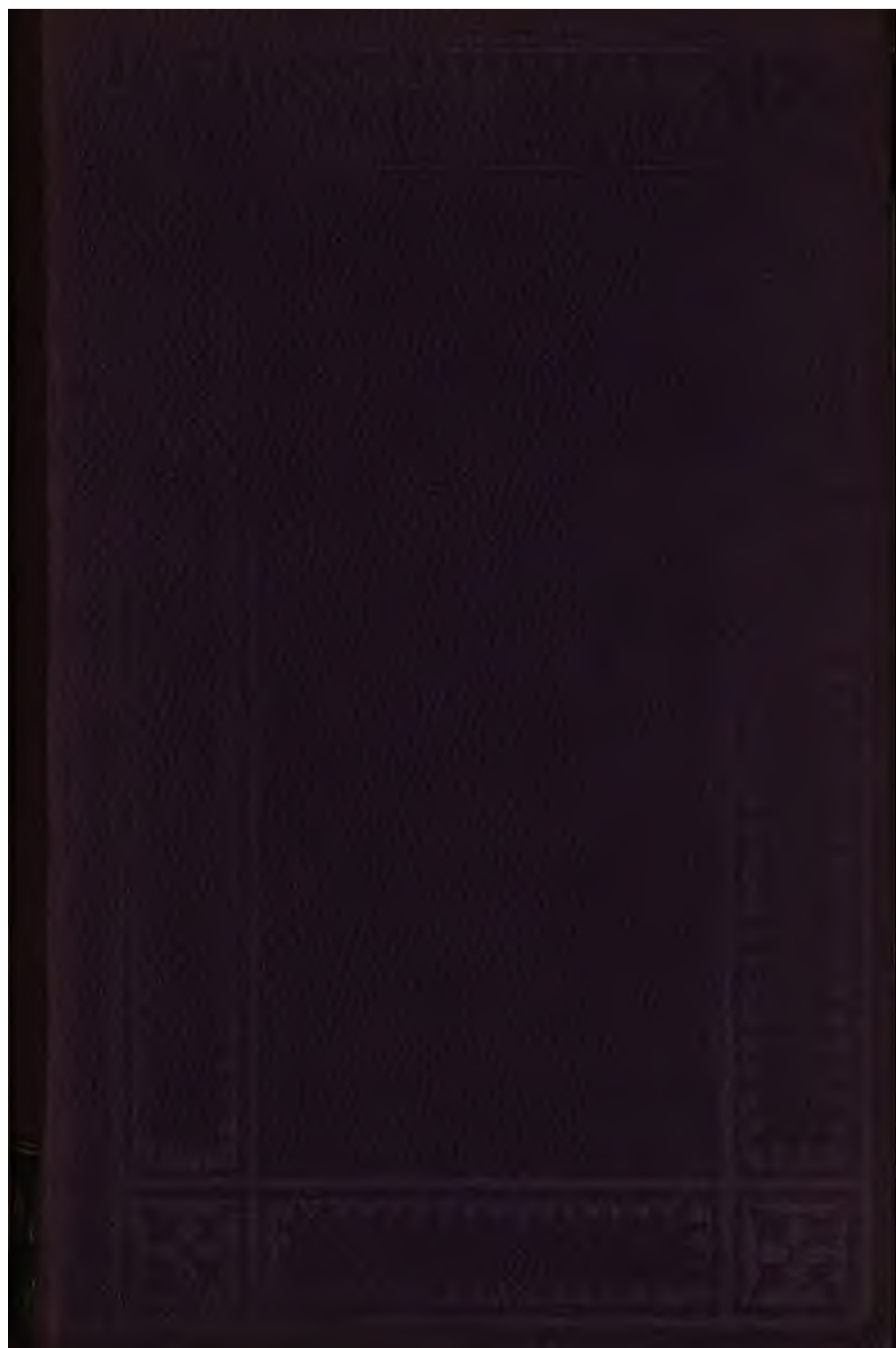
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# YORKE HOUSE.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY WILLIAM PLATT.

AUTHOR OF "BETTY WESTMINSTER," &c., &c.

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# YORKE HOUSE.

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## CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH ROLAND TELLS CLEMENT WALCOT THE  
LITTLE STORY HE PROMISED HIM, ABOUT 'BEN  
AND THE BLACKBIRD.'

ROLAND looked so pale and cut up by his anxious night's watch at Yorke House, that Mary Grey started ! when she shook hands and wished him 'good morning.' The Vicar, already dressed and ready for his ride over to Rexford, when they had breakfasted, regarded him wistfully, as he sat down ; and for a minute or



two Roland was so overcome by his feelings, that the tears swam in his eyes, as encountering Arnold Grey's fixed enquiringly on him, all that he had gone through since they parted, flashed afresh on his mind, and so paralysed his utterance, that he sat speechless; till turning the current of his thoughts, by adverting to "the beauty of the morning, and what a fine day it was for the Assizes," Mary led them off into another channel; and presently he was more like himself again, and could trust his voice to tell the sad tale he was full of. And tell it he did, in his own short, plain, earnest way, so truthfully and affectingly, that twice the Vicar turned his egg round and round, to find the right end to crack the shell at, before he seemingly could satisfy himself; and then, apparently, it was not to his fancy, when he had found it, for pushing it from him, nothing but a mouthful of toast and a cup of tea went down his throat that morning, so little care had he for anything just then but Roland's conversation.

What impression Roland's account of his

brother's sleep-walking had on the Vicar, no one knew but himself. He listened to it with deep interest, but said little. Joel Yorke might walk in his sleep, as well as others. There was nothing wonderful in that. On a mind so keenly alive to morbid sensibilities as was Joel's, it was likely enough that the night would bring him little more rest than the day had done, come any extraordinary cause of excitement to disturb it; in which case, nothing more probable than that the brain, labouring under heavy pressure, would obey the ruling power that impelled it, and wander in its sleep, and commit many strange absurdities. Since the dreadful tragedy that had thrown so deep a pall over Yorke House, that Joel Yorke and Nanny had had it pretty well all to themselves after nightfall, unless Roland or his sister Mabel were there, for all the years that had passed since the old man's death, Joel had always seen himself to the safe fastening of the doors and windows before he went to bed; and the state in which he returned from the Hall, after the dinner, pre-

cluding the possibility of his going his night-rounds as usual, it was not at all unaccountable, that the brain should have been sensible of something left undone that ought to have been done, and which, shaping itself into neglected bars, and bolts, and forgotten locks, and midnight thieves and murderers, &c., &c., took Joel Yorke from his pillow, and down and about, before he could sleep in peace.

All this the Vicar could perfectly understand. But when Roland, with a vivid distinctness that blanched Mary's cheeks, showed them how Joel had gone down on one knee, nearly naked as he was, and endeavoured to efface the blood-stains in the floor with the palm of his hand, and then gazed at it, as it were, and rubbed on again for the space of a minute in that appalling way, "by which he made sure that his intellects were injured," so dark a cloud overspread Arnold Grey's brow, as he called to mind what Ralph had said to him in the gaol at Rexford, about the unaccountable fac-simile of the master of York House he saw coming out of Holly Corpse on the night of

the murder, that he was glad of the pretext Mrs. Bonney's announcement, that "the horse was brought round," gave him, to disguise from Roland, for the present, the deep gloom his shocking relation of his brother's wretched state of mind had thrown him into.

And Demosthenes—for the Vicar called all his favourite old quadrupeds after the ancients—getting impatient, as Ben drew off his overcoat, "I shall see you in the evening, I suppose?" said Arnold Grey, while Roland tucked the 'red tartan' round Mary's knees safe and snug; "by when we shall have a budget full for each other? Come to dinner if you can?" and Demosthenes standing no further parley, off he went in his usual stately style, so befitting the renowned pedigrees of his long list of stalwart sires; "not one of whom," if the Vicar's word could be trusted, "had ever, to his knowledge, 'taken a bribe' of any man living, to do a deed unworthy of his famous lineage; which, if history told the truth, was more than could be said of his illustrious namesake."

And now feeling somewhat happier, for having unburdened his mind of its night-load to the Vicar and Mary Grey, Roland bethought himself of the invitation he had given Clement Walcot, to breakfast with him that morning ; which, if he made haste, there was no reason why Clement should go without. And then they could cross together to The Hall, and shew such sufficient reasons to the Colonel and Mrs. Ferrand, for carrying Mabel off to Yorke House, as would insure Joel the careful quiet nurse he needed, and Clement a chance, to say good bye to her, if so minded, for so long as her sisterly services kept her a prisoner there, and himself walking up and down opposite—when not at work on The New Epic, or lashing the waters—in the forlorn hope of fortuitously catching sight of the adored shadow, if not of the substance, passing the staircase window.

“ You’re a nice young man ! ” called out Clement, over the ‘ hog’s back,’ as Roland waved his hand to him from the road ; “ a very nice sort of young man, indeed ! to ask people

to breakfast, and bring their own fish—and then treat them this way.”

“What way?” smiled Roland. “Fried trout for breakfast—Dora is frying them, I hope?—and give you no time to get an appetite? call that friendly? You, a poet and philosopher, and not know what’s the ‘best sauce?’”

“Beats your reverence’s jealous heart, to be told how much the noble fish weighs. It waits your reverence’s convenience, done to a turn.”

“What, bagged him, have you?”

“In the pan, please your reverence. I won’t answer for where he might have been in another five minutes.”

“Come along then, and let’s see what he is like,” responded Roland, shaking hands. “And then I have something to tell you—something serious!”

“Is that why you smile so? Your reverence will pardon the presumption of the question, but this is not the first time I have remarked, that when one of your reverence’s cloth has anything disagreeable to communi-

cate, ten to one but he smiles—smiles blandly, as though aloes from his lips were honey, and so oily were his sharpest caustics, they couldn't hurt you, if they would. Possibly, your reverence can explain the anomaly? All the same, no horrid *affairs*, if you please."

"What would you say of us, if we wore a perpetual frown?" returned Roland, intimating to Dora, that "time was precious with him that morning, and the quick appearance of breakfast on table no less important. Consult only our own felings, we might be fairly pardoned doing that oftener than we do. Be assured, my dear Clement, it is easier a great deal to learn in this life how to frown than to smile. If we were to shed tears as often as we reasonably might, I am afraid we should do little else but weep."

"The smiles become you most, don't they?"

"In our Christian dealings with the frowns? yes, assuredly."

"Are the oiled keys that fit the locks best that open the hearts? Oh, you are all so ingenious, and sly, and facile, and expert, there is

no being up to you ! Shall I tell you how I always feel when I am talking to a parson, who is sweet on me ? Ah ! here's his noble Lordship, that's a blessing !"

"If it will redound to your credit, as well as his, I should be most happy to know."

"That he thinks himself immeasurably better than I am, a giant of goodness ! in comparison !"

"Small as that in your own eyes, are you ? Highly promising !"

"Now just answer me this :—Don't it pain your neck dreadfully to keep it too long on the stretch, looking up high ? You are—I don't mind owning it—by George ! he's a noble fellow, isn't he ?—where's the catchup ?—that's the stuff, sir, with fried trout !—I was going to say, please your reverence, touching that little pertinent comparison we were drawing between the Great Giant of Goodness and your humble servant—personally speaking, I mean looking at you every way—you, *quid* parson, are by no means a bad sort of fellow,



left to yourself, to your own genial, generous nature, as given you by your mother. Ah, she was a genuine, tender, stern, kind-hearted, keen-seeing, easy, observing, unobserving, stand-no-nonsense creature, as ever blew you up well for not scraping your shoes before you came in on grandfather's carpet, and then gave you a great hunk of bread and jam, not to do it again. Possibly you may, by and bye, see a life-like likeness of that estimable lady in the New Epic, that will strike home. But suppose we talk no more on that subject? Very well. All the same, Clement Walcot must be permitted to observe, with all due respect for *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, and without any intention of saying an unkind thing, if he know it, of any living being, especially—help yourself to some of the belly, it's as good as any Severn salmon you ever caught—you don't eat anything, what's the matter?—especially, I was going to observe, of the man of whose tea and toast he is partaking,—that, keen-seeing and kind-hearted as Charlotte Yorke was

(peace be to her!) she made a great mistake in one thing!"

"Is that all?"

"It was a grievous omission! Roland."

"Ah, I see! Yes, I must keep a cow, if I can get me a bit of meadow somehow handy. Then who won't envy me my Hermitage?"

"Nothing more's wanted to make it a paradise! Your strawberries are delicious. But touching your revered parent—with all the wealth of Yorke House, can you call to memory one single instance of their ever having given you cream in your tea?"

"I suppose it was a cut above us, in those days. There was always enough milk, I hope!"

"Oh! hypercritical am I? Your most obedient! Enough milk, eh? Spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar that way? Like a Yorke, that. How many times, pray, has the brass knocker on Yorke House been cleaned, as it ought to be, for oh, who can tell how long? Rich enough to have a brass knocker, but not to send for three pen'orth of

sweet oil and brick-dust round the corner, to polish it off with. Hypercritical am I? Who preached last Sunday, in the morning, when all the grand folks were at church, on—‘Do as you would be done by?’ Yes, and a matter of two-pence—two-pence only, your reverence—sent over this morning to farmer Hobbles, there opposite (if so be you can’t keep a cow yourself) would have done it handsome! been ample for us both, old fellow, and been doing as you would be done by, your reverence.”

“How so?”

“The innocent hypocrisy of that now. Your Reverence don’t love cream a bit? You didn’t nearly empty the cream-jug into your tea last night, just before my turn came? I didn’t see you do it, I suppose? Doing as you would be done by that, was it? Not that I should have cared a rap about it—for the Rector hadn’t left you much, that’s true—if you hadn’t looked so grave all the while. Call that honest, do you, pulling a long face, when you’re pleased? Yes, and you would

have smiled all the same, if the Rector hadn't left you a drop ; aye, and laughed out loud, if there had been no milk either? And why? If you love cream, where's the harm—if you own it? The harm is, under your reverence's favor, in taking it, when there is plenty of milk alongside it, and then drinking it, as if a cup of cold water would have been just as acceptable to your reverence. There's an awful amount of humbug in that! Won't your reverence take any more? No?—here goes then for the head and tail—where there's one, there's another, they say—please the fates, I mean to have a try for her ladyship to-morrow—by Jove! you stand in your own light, not to follow suit with the 'praties'—don't Dora know how to fry a 'pratie,' your honor, that's all? Apropos of which, by the bye—of the story you told me to remind you of yesterday, don't you remember? nothing about any horrid *affairs*, eh?"

"It must be a very short story, if I tell it you now," said Roland, laying his knife and fork down, and emptying his cup; "for when

you have quite done picking the bones, I have 'other fish to fry' to-day, over at The Hall; and I won't say but what I may take you with me, if you are a good boy, and will be on your best behaviour; for I am charged with a very important mission to my sister, which brooks no delay."

"To Mabel? The deuce you are?"

"Again, what has *he* to do with it? When shall I induce you, Clement, to altogether cut that connexion? Where's the heroism of it? Is it Epic, in any sense?"

"*Peccavi*. Will your reverence, as a lady is in the case, make all allowances, and, not to keep Miss Mabel waiting, cut the story as short as possible? A graphic outline will amply suffice. It may be a master-piece nevertheless. What say the Latins?—*mutum est pictura poema—verbum sapienti*—go on."

"Let me see," began Roland, "it was your talking of 'carrying a sack of his Reverence's potatoes,' I think, that put me in mind, how, in some things that I have seen the folly of, I was, up to twenty, more, at heart, like poet

Clement Walcot, than it would have gone as well with me, perhaps, as it has, if it had not been for a salutary lesson or two I was taught, not only by the excellent Vicar of Millford, but by his gardener, Ben."

"Your reverence surprises me!"

"Drop that nonsense. It is Roland Yorke to Clement Walcot now. Clement, I am in earnest."

"Oh! so there's to be no more 'cakes and ale,' then, and 'ginger hot i' the mouth,' because your reverence is in earnest? In for it, am I?" and heaving a sigh, Clement pushed the picked bones submissively from him, and throwing himself back in his chair, half-closed his eyes, and was rapt in deep attention.

"To look at me now," went on Roland, "you would scarcely believe I had ever been, at heart, the impulsive creature that you are, my dear Clement, subdued only by the necessity of circumstances, which fettered my poetical soarings within somewhat more rational bounds than yours have been kept in by. Left to myself, I should have liked, of all

things, an ivied cot like this to live in, and enough to raise me above the necessity of doing more with head or hands, for my daily bread, than the whim of the moment prompted. It was not to be. My father was rich, and could have well afforded to portion me off, after my own heart, but that would not have been after his. 'I must work, or I might starve.' I thought it a hard sentence, when it was passed, and fretted under it a little; but it was the law of my house—the great canon by which the Yorkes had fought and conquered. So, seeing no help for it, I put a curb on my spirited Pegasus; and, though if he could have got his head many a time, there is no doubt but that he would have run away with me fast enough, I kept so tight a hold of him, for I was obliged, that at last I could let the bridle fall on his neck, and he would hardly cock an ear, come the old key-note thrilling again as loud as it would. I am talking now of when I was a youth, at home for the holidays, a great, tall, strapping youth of eighteen, old enough quite to know right from

wrong, and to have a pretty stout will of my own. 'Joel,' said my father, one day, when we were sitting cracking walnuts and sipping our glass of currant wine after dinner, 'what is your idea of a happy life?' 'To follow in the footsteps of my father,' answered Joel. 'And, Roland, what is yours?' Then I made a sad blunder! though Mr. Drayton, our head clerk, kept pursing his brows so at me across the table, I must have been blind not to have seen it; for I candidly acknowledged, that my *summum bonum* of earthly felicity, was 'to have enough to live like a gentleman, and anybody might take all the rest.' My mother came to my rescue, and plainly proved 'I was a foolish boy, and should grow wiser with years;' and Mr. Drayton being of the same opinion, my father was pacified, and no more was said on the subject. Clement?"

"What?" opening his eyes wide.

"Oh, you are not asleep?"

"And talking of yourself, man—for shame!"

"Well then, that night my mother got me



alone in her room, and we had it over and over and over together, till I saw what a booby I had been, not to understand my own interests better than to wish to be an idle gentleman, of all lives the most pitiable and wretched ! After which, I took myself seriously to task, and resolved, by the Vicar's advice, on asking my father for a stool in his counting-house. You, who knew my poor dear father so well, need not be told, Clement, what a grave man he was. Do you ever look up at the Old King in High Street ? There he is, Heaven rest his soul ! his very counterpart. Was there ever such a likeness ? It seems to speak to me, whenever I gaze on it. Well, I shall never forget his smile, grave as he was, when I went and asked him for that three-legged stool. 'It was a certain fortune to me,' Drayton whispered in my ear, as I went out ; 'the wisest thing I had ever done. Clement !'

"All right—go on—the proof of the pudding's in the eating."

"For ten days, I and my stool were on the best of terms. The compliments that passed

between us are too numerous to mention now. It said the handsomest things to me I ever heard in my life, and I could have almost hugged it of a morning, it lifted me so high in my own estimation. Clement?"

"Go on, I say. How fussy you are."

"One afternoon, the sun shone so bright into the office, when they had all gone to dinner, and left me alone, finishing some castings up, that I could not help seeing a great mass of cobwebs running all along the cornice over the old ledgers and day-books, where Nelly's broom never went; and what must come into my mind, but how nice a fresh blow would be down by the river! and as it was Saturday, and a sort of half-holiday, what was to hinder me buckling basket at back, and taking my rod in hand, and bringing home a fry for supper? Clement?"

"Well?"

"My Pegasus was on the curb again. I could feel him pulling at me, almost as hard-mouthed and hot-headed as ever!"

"Bravo! What a spree!"

"Yes; and a rare race he led me! Till fairly knocked up—for I hadn't had a bite, not one, I sneaked up to Ben, the gardener, the back way,—for somehow I shirked that deep keen eye of the Vicar's, just then, and would have gone five miles round, rather than have stood any of his catechising,—and finding he was dining out, I sat down on the barrow, into which Ben was pitching some new potatoes he was forking up; and snatching at one, shied it at a great pilfering black-bird under the gooseberries, as if potatoes were to be picked up, like pebbles, any day of the year."

"A slight error on your part, Master Roland."

"So Ben evidently thought. I shall never forget the look of mingled pity and grief he gave me. It amused me, though, more than it affected me, as it ought to have done. 'What's the matter, Ben?' 'Matter enough, Master Roland, if you chuck the bread from you that way. Rich as he is, see if your father would do it. Waste not, want not, sir;' and he went on with his forking. I

laughed, though I felt my cheeks burn. 'Please, toss me that large round one at the top there, Master Roland,' 'There then,' said he, dropping it in his pocket; 'it's not as big near as the one you chucked away, but that's no odds—mine's here, and yours is there—come twelvemonth, and we'll see then.'

"The mean, miserable curmudgeon!"

"Just what I thought to myself."

"What a disgusting state of mind to be in!"

"Almost the very words I used."

"To make all that hideous fuss about a potato! The atrocious audacity of it, too! And he went and scooped the eyes out of his, I suppose, the niggardly old file! and planted them, I shouldn't wonder, to spite you?"

"Yes; and took me to—how many do you fancy, next year—put away on purpose in a sly corner, to shew me? Fact, a hundred and thirty-three. And mighty short and consequential he was about it, I can tell you!"

"Mercy on us! and what did you do with your diminished head?"

"You may well ask. Hid it away from myself as well as I could. It blushed so, I was quite ashamed of it! 'Call them beauties, don't you?' he grinned—you know his sly way always when he thinks he has nailed you?—'And where be yours now, I wonder, Master Roland? Shall I tell you what I've thought many a time—no offence I hope?—how the old bird must have smiled in his sleeve many a day, as he saw it lying rotting there in waste under the bush; and the blight everywhere, and sound sorts fetching two-and-thirty shillings a sack, Master Roland, if you could get them anyhow.'"

"Confound his impudence! Your fingers itched to punch his thick head, didn't they?"

"Clement, I went home with a lesson learnt, that I had never been taught like that in my life before. And I chewed the cud of it well, as I lay on my bed. And I went to my stool next day, grave, but gay as a lark! And I remember, my father coming in with Drayton, and their talking together for more than an hour, and more than once looking at

me, while I went on with my entries. And before the year was out, I was put a peg higher. And after a while, all in due time, a peg higher still—when Joel began to get a little jealous—and—”

“Yes, I know—you were getting on swimmingly! and a precious fine fat fortune it has brought you, hasn’t it? Brother Joel knows how much, I’ll warrant, to a fraction. Somewhere about £90 per annum, is it not? for sterling value received, from the sweat of your brow? And how much has *he* got? And, with all his talk of ‘following in his father’s steps,’ was, comparatively, a lazy rascal, was he not?”

“No more, my dear Clement, than, if used to His glory and honor, Who gives, and Who takes, away, he is heartily welcome to, as far as I am concerned.”

“Ah! I thought as much. With a view to that ‘glorious’ end—pardon me—I should have imagined brother Roland might have been safely entrusted with the talents, as well as brother Joel?”

"It has seemed fit to Him to judge otherwise. In all things His will be done!"

"Amen! Though with regard to your own fair claim to that little birthright share which your Quixotic Reverence—pardon me, I am a plain-speaking person, though a poet—snapped your fingers at when it was offered you, may I make so bold as humbly to ask, and most reverently, what His will had to do with it?"

"More perhaps than we know of at present, Clement. At all events, I feel it to be so. I feel, I am where I am, because of His will; and that I am what I am, because it seemed good to Him to take from me everything else on which my heart leant, but my own strength. God be thanked, it increases daily—increases in Him. Therein I feel as strong as a Lion. Look at my brother. Need I envy him? God help us both! Rich and poor, my dear Clement, have alike need to say that oftener than they do."

"Ah! that 'intended legacy' in hand, would, you think, have stiffened your neck.

more than was meet in His eyes? Truly"—and as he spoke, Clement's delighted gaze took a circuit of the little domain in a ring-fence, which Roland, with the spare money that came to him from his mother, had made his own—"your lot has fallen in a pleasant place. It is a goodly heritage, as heart could wish!" and Clement heaved a sigh.

"Why do you sigh?"

"At the thought of what I would give, to have just such another."

"Ah! To make it the elysium your poetic soul is revelling in, something else is wanted, I am afraid, besides the place, were it Paradise itself."

"In Clement Walcot's case—what?"

"The quiet, settled mind, to enjoy it."

"Pitch me such another tent anywhere—within sight of you, if possible—and then see."

"To know its value, you must be your own builder. Who are you, to have tents pitched for you. Up, and rely on yourself!"

"Oh! that's it, is it? And where did you



get your great experience from, that your reverence crows so loud?"

"Some of it from Ben and The Blackbird, which opened my eyes considerably. A feather in the air will tell which way the wind blows, if you will only use your wits, as well as a ship full sail. More than a hundred per cent, the fruit of thrift and industry, all in one year—call that not a God-send?"

"Pretty stationary, a poor curate's stipend, I fancied?"

"Stationary? Ah, you don't look at it in Ben's light, that's clear—make no allowance for the large margins—

Only fools scorn small beginnings;  
May be you are not aware,  
What may be their wondrous winnings,  
Who of little things take care?

Know you what a simple wheat-ear,  
Haply planted at your birth,  
When you reached your come-of-age year,  
Would, with interest, have been worth?

Springs the oak not from an acorn?  
Yes; and use your chances well,  
You may, though of little note born,  
Rise to greatness—who can tell?"

“By Jove! you don’t say so?” and, jumping up, Clement danced round the study for joy!

“Please to steer clear of the table,” implored Roland, taking up his hat and stick with all the gravity he could command. “You will know what it is to lay in a stock of half-dozens, when you come to keep house.”

“Half dozens! That’s all you can do is it, with—how much a-year, did you say it was for the cure of souls? and Ben’s broad margin? Talk in that way to an oak? Yes, your reverence, an oak. You’ll see, only have patience—little acorn only as it is at present. I say, you will see. Far be it from Clement Walcot, of all men, to boast of himself; but I repeat it, your reverence will see. What? An oak, please your reverence, of Clement Walcot’s own growing; under whose genial shade your reverence may be proud to repose awhile one of these fine days, and, peradventure, talk of this pleasant morning at your reverence’s little Elysium On Earth, The Hermitage, as a day worthy to be marked

in your reverence's memory with the whitest of white stones!"

"Jubilate! jubilate!! jubilate!!!

"And the moral, please your reverence, of Ben's 'praties,' your honor?

"Is what Clement Walcot can point for himself very well, I daresay," smiled Roland, "brave heart of oak as he is! else I wouldn't give a button for his chances. So, come along, and let's see what Mabel is doing with herself this morning. We must step out, too. And I will now tell you what for, if you will be serious."

## CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH IS TOLD HOW CLEMENT AND MABEL  
PUT FIVE AND FOUR TOGETHER, AND MADE  
NINE OF IT.

CLEMENT WALCOT could be serious, very serious, as well as very merry and heedless sometimes. He had his heavy hours as well as his light ; and when his defiant spirit gave way, he was no less low and dejected, for its having been strung a great deal tighter than, in most persons, is consistent with safe tension or sound concord. No chords could bear to be constantly screwed up beyond concert pitch, as his often were. Snap they must go,

or endure such an amount of stretching, as made them at last so exquisitely sensitive, that the slightest touch would set them all on a jar, and so out of tune with themselves and everybody and everything else, that there was no bearing them. In proportion as they were too much up, down they would go too low; and then who, to look at him, would have ever fancied he was a hero in any shape, or an oak-grower, or epic-writer, or, in short, could do anything to immortalize himself?

It was this silly up on the stilts, and then down in the mouth, turn of Clement's, that made Roland look at him so anxiously at times. Sound hearted Roland knew him to be, and with a little more of that plodding perseverance, when at Oxford, which had got him, Roland, what few honours he had gained, he would have had no chance beside Clement in the race. For if Clement pleased to apply himself, what was there, within the scope of his powers, that they could not master, aye, and master well? which left no excuse, in Roland's love for him, for those suicidal fits

of morbid indolence and irresolution that threw him on his back, praying for "not only ready roasted legs of mutton to be rained down on him," as Roland used jokingly to taunt him with, "but that they might be swimming in nice hot gravy, too, which he was so fond of."

If his father had been a prudent man, Clement Walcot would have had more excuse than he had for those heavy sighs whenever he was at The Hermitage, thinking, "what he would give to have just such another little Elysium On Earth for his own!" for then he might, however rashly, have drawn on the future, to make it up with his conscience, touching those enervating longings of his for "an ivied cot, and a dear, queen-like, joyous, generous girl like Mabel Yorke! and somewhere about five hundred a year, to 'keep the pot boiling,' as indispensable to his happiness. As it was, that little paternal patrimony, which ought to have come when his father was dead and gone, not only to him but to his sisters Maud and Annie, had taken unto itself those

wings which, strong as they are to fly away with the treasures, never suffice to bring them back again. And now it must be with him, as it was with Roland, by his father's edict, 'he must work or starve;' for do some work he *must*, if only to earn his title to what his Aunt Agatha had left him in her will, or most assuredly he would never touch a farthing of it. In another three months he would attain to the age stipulated (out of much Auntly love and concern for him), when he could go to the Trustees and demand his legacy; provided always, he could produce satisfactory proofs of having fulfilled the terms required,—and as yet he had apparently determined on no fixed course of life, by which Roland saw any probability of his making a shilling by that wholesome exercise of the strength that was in him, than whom no one had seen how sufficient it was, brought out, for all needful ends, clearer than Aunt Agatha; wherefore she had given him till Twenty Five, to come to his senses, by when she "made sure he would understand the necessity of returning to mother

earth, who was a kind generous mother to those who knew how to treat her, and had all due respect and regard for the skies, and the clouds, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, so that they minded their own business, and would be so good as to let her mind hers, too, as she ought."

When Roland, therefore, heard Clement still going on with his "moonshine mountains, from which nothing, in all probability, as practically profitable as even a little mouse was ever likely to result," he might well be out of patience with him, and sometimes inclined almost to think he deserved a no better fate than his father's. In fact, rail at his father, and those 'horrid affairs,' as he would, Sir Hugh's ambitious blood ran largely in Clement's veins, only it showed itself differently; for while the father was galloping to destruction one way, with his wild visionary schemes of one sort or another, the son was off to the woods, and waters, and dells, and dingles, and sweet thyme-banks, and 'ivy-haunts,' and, from thence, to the sun, moon,



and stars, and heaven only knows where else—anywhere, in sober truth, but where the toil and drudgery and wear and tear of every day life were going on, or where a fair day's wage was to be got for a fair day's work.

“How was it to end?”

It was a question, seemingly, that troubled Roland more than it did Clement, to judge by the apparent indifference with which he usually disposed of those ‘horrid affairs,’ when it seemed good to Roland to revert to them, during their many pleasant chats together at the Hermitage, when if there were one time more than another that Clement's real heart would open, it was then; though it was ticklish ground when you come to tread on his pride, which, whether true or false, *was* his pride, and pretty soon resented any sort of friendly rough riding over it. For which reason, Roland let him run on with his vein, knowing how useless it is, with a view to conviction, to too deeply wound the self-esteem of a disposition like Clement's, which if it cannot be made to see its faults, by judiciously holding up the

mirror to them, will never be told them, to any purpose, by dashing it in its face and down its throat, whether it will or not. Kindness and patience and clever handling may do much, that firm but gentle kind of handling which makes you better, by inducing you to think well of yourself; whereas, to disgust you with your own image, to distress you at the very thought of it, is at once to rob you of every vanity, except that which the ugliest are said to possess, because they are so.

Wherefore, when Roland saw what he thought a fair chance of giving a home-blow, without hurting too much, he would tell any apt story he could call to mind, with fact on the face of it, such as that of 'Ben and the Blackbird;' which he would then leave, without comment, to what virtue there might be in it, to have its effect, when it had gone deep enough; a certain result with Clement, if he gave any ear to it at all—only let him digest it, his own way and at his own leisure, when "returning again to mother earth," as Aunt Agatha expressed it, no man had better facul-

ties—poet Laureate, though he was told he would be some day—for “coming to the truth of it all” than Clement Walcot, if he would only exercise and rightly use them. By which the reader will be pleased not to infer that we mean to say there were any of the essential properties in him, to make that most useful, if not universally most ornamental, of Her Majesty’s lieges, a man of business—far from it. That highly useful person, Clement was not born to be. The world can do without him. By all accounts, there are enough, and to spare, of even the Usefuls. The supply, seemingly, keeps ahead of the demand. Poets are rare. Poetasters rather more plentiful. But both put together, cull the wide world of them all, a nut-shell would hold them, compared with the space wanted for the Practicals. Permit them their corner, then. As nothing that has life was created in vain, so, may be, poets and poetasters have their uses—for please to remember, dear reader, *poeta nascitur, non fit*. No doubt they fulfil a wise end in the Great Design. The senses

were not given us for nothing. Nature has clothed herself, in her hills, and valleys, and groves, and gardens, and green leaves, and hedge-rows, with endless colours of the richest and gaudiest! and are we to be content with our walls, and tables, and bookshelves, merely as the builders and mechanics give them to us? Are we not to love and delight in our homes, as well as live in them? Is there no worth in the sweet smiles that our books and pictures, &c., have for us, when we return to them? Stripped of them, how naked and cold we should be! Messrs. Practicals & Co., however plain, we greet you well! you have our highest esteem!—Gentlemen and Ladies, poets and poetesses, authors, artists, and all, of every degree, God save you! may your shadows never be less!

Clement turned pale, when, on their way to The Hall, Roland told him how ill Joel was. Though not generally supposed to deal in them, facts affect poets, when they are inter-

ested in them, pretty much the same as other people.

“Suppose he should die,” said Clement to himself, “how then, with my father?”

The thought was natural enough, and might well take the color out of his cheeks; till hearing that there was no present danger, Clarence’s imaginative mind began to busy itself with, “how it would fare with that little fresh sum, by way of final farewell to the last ‘holdfast,’ which, if Joel Yorke failed his father, terribly pressed as he then was, *must* be found somewhere, or woe betide them! When did things ever happen as you wanted them?” and Clement turned sick at the question, which, but for stern necessity, it would have made him blush to have put to himself. Then, “supposing Mr. Brocket got that done, so as to save them, for the nonce, how much would be left of it in three months? when Joel Yorke’s arrears were wiped off, now that Swivel, and that confounded knave Jenkins! had lugged his father in again, heaven

only knew how deep? Not a shilling. And then what should they do, when it was all gone, and there was no more to be had? Was his father mad? Where would they be that day six months? There must be a smash. Nice, wasn't it? As to Annie ever accepting Joel Yorke for a husband, even if his father would consent to it, it made his blood run cold to think of it! Best knock that idea on the head for ever. As far as he himself was concerned, he would rather follow her to the grave. Heigho! the devil's in everything!" groaned Clement; "what would I give for a quiet life!"—which bringing them, after some further mutual 'brown studies,' too deep for utterance, to the bay window of the breakfast-room, at which Mabel was standing chatting with the Colonel, while Mrs. Ferrand was filling a pretty moss-basket from a heap of fresh geranium blossoms they had just brought in from the greenhouse—a change came over the spirit of Clement's dream; and over his cheeks too, which catching sight, we suppose, of Mabel's, also similarly alternating more from

pale to red, and red to pale, than was their usual wont, thought it only beseeeming to hoist the blush roses in concert. And thus they stood, mutually smiling at each other, and colouring, for at least a quarter of a minute; though the Colonel, her *pro. tem.* guardian and protector, in virtue of the warrant given him by Aunt Poynts, had his eye on them all the time; and had to account to Auntie "for every look and word of her ward, while at The Hall, not strictly in accordance with those rules and regulations for maidenly grace and decorum, the due observance of which, on the part of Miss Mabel—however, the Colonel might wink more than he ought sometimes at her 'innocent freedoms,' as he called them—was the one thing needful, touching that Thousand-a-Year, more or less, which Auntie dear had to leave to somebody some day, when the few sands yet left her were run out, and she could herself enjoy it no longer."

And now having made known how ill Joel was, and that he had come to carry Mabel off to nurse him, and shewn the Colonel clearly,

that "go she must, by the doctor's orders," Roland "would take a turn with her round the shrubbery, to say what else he had to say; and then they would start at once for Yoxminster, if Mrs. Ferrand could spare the ponies, to run them in, and convey what needful selections from her wardrobe Mabel might want to take with her?"

'The 'turn' put Mabel in possession of Roland's fears, on Joel's account, viz., that his mind was so deeply affected by Annie's rejection of him, that the probability was, he would, directly he was better, send for Mr. Brockett; and, if the result of the proposals he then meant to make for her hand in marriage left him no other resource, leave Sir Hugh no alternative but to consent to their union, or abide the consequences, however dreadful they might be."

"He would never have the heart to do it?" exclaimed Mabel.

"Would I had the power to prevent his ever being put to the test," differed Roland.

"Surely you might have it, if you liked."



Roland made no answer.

"How refuse you what he acknowledges is your own, what he has long ago told you you have only to ask for, and have?"

"I have asked for it, and been refused."

"Refused?"

"Or, what was to the same effect, when we talked about it not long back, he told me, 'that, in consequence of my having declined it, when I was up at Oxford, he had invested the money in a way that he didn't see how he could well meddle with it,' or words to the same purpose."

"Then good bye, I'm afraid," pouted Mabel, dejectedly, "to a little hope I have been weaving in my brain all night. As Clement says, 'when do things ever happen as you want them?'"

"In the present instance, they certainly do seem to go rather contrary," agreed Roland, more vexed than he chose to shew. "I think I shall have another try, all the same."

Mabel looked very grave.

"Illness sometimes softens the heart."

Mabel drew a deep breath.

"I have often known it to do what nothing else would."

"In this instance, I am not disposed to be very sanguine," demurred Mabel, with her eyes on the path. "What makes him so ill? Will that be likely to plead in our favor? On the contrary. Do you suppose he won't suspect why you want the money just now? Of course he will. Are *you* in difficulties? Have *you* mortgaged The Hermitage? and if so, what arrears of interest are there on it? Do *you* speculate in Bacon and Cabbage Companies? Troubled as his mind is about one thing or another, trust Joel's keen eyes for seeing to the bottom of it. Cheat him if you can. Shall I tell you what I think would be much better?

"Tell me of any fair way to get what we want, and I will call you my dearest, kindest, cleverest, best of Mabels!"

"And if I can't, how then?"

"Then"—and Roland heaved a heavy sigh—"clearly enough—the consequences—"

"Are too shocking to think of? That's true. So, I have been turning it over all night; which is better, isn't it, than going about moaning, and bewailing, and wringing one's hands, and tearing one's hair out by the roots?—and it strikes me, if *you* can't claim your rights, *I* can."

"How do you mean?"

"Our dear mother divided what fortune of her own she had at her death, between us, did she not—Joel having almost enough? When I say divided, she gave me Four Thousand Pounds, clear, and you Two. It was an equitable division, I have heard you say fifty times, under the circumstances?"

"Most equitable!"

"Well, then, now listen. They would give me only three and-a-half per cent. for it, in the funds; whereas, left in his hands, Joel gives me five. You know all about that. Joel pays to a day. I have no fault to find. But it so happens that I want my Four Thousand. And where's the harm of my asking him for it? He has but to draw a cheque, and the

thing's done. Can you conceive any objection ?”

“ Yes, one very grave one.”

“ Don't pull such a wo-begone face, or you'll frighten me to death! As Clement says, ‘ that's what you grave folks always do, when you are more pleased than you want one to think you are.’ Out with it !”

“ First of all—”

“ Oh, there's more than *one* query, is there ? You serious folks are so circumstantial ?”

“ First of all—why is Mabel Yorke to give her little all, to pay other people's debts ?”

“ Give ? Am I such a donkey ?”

“ Lend then. On what security, pray ?”

“ The best I can get.”

“ Ah, I forgot—”

“ No, not that—they may keep all the Bacon and Cabbages to themselves, I don't fancy them. Nor the whole Second Edition of The New Epic—though, mind you, I would infinitely prefer that, of the two. Was I born and bred and brought up a Yoxminster Yorke for nothing ?”

"Yes, seemingly, if you throw away the substance for the shadow."

"My name is Yorke, I say, is it not?"

"Till you change it."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Then a few thousands would come in very useful?"

"Is it compulsory that I should marry a poor man?"

"Not unless you like."

"Granted that I do, and love him dearly—how nice to lay him under an everlasting obligation—what power I should have—what a hold over him—able to crush him in a moment, if he offended me—isn't it delicious to think of it?—isn't it Yorke-like?—ask Joel."

"Ask your own heart, that's best."

"What?"

"Whether you would not shew your love more, by saying point blank to Clement Walcott—"

"Clement Walcott?"

"To Clement, the poet,—should he ever

want you for a wife,—yes, Clement, I have no objection, when you can shew me that Five Thousand, in hand, left you by Aunt Agatha; for then I will shew you the Four Thousand, all safe and snug, left me by my mother. Five and four make nine, do they not? A very nice little sum to fall back on, should an ‘ivied cot’ be the *summum bonum* of felicity, and any grave question ever arise, as to the best way of keeping the pot boiling, *minus* those ‘hats-full’ that The New Epic ought to have fetched, but did not.”

“Upon my word, ‘you parish pastors,’ as Clement says, lay down the law prettily. We hear you, for we must.”

“And, like good sensible souls, think more of what, in much love, we say to you, than that little independent spirit within you, at times, chooses to acknowledge. Wherefore, I make bold to ask you another question? Of what earthly use would Four Thousand Pounds be to the Walcots, in their present straights? A mere drop in the ocean.”

"It would pay off the mortgage arrears."

"How do you know?"

"From what I have been told."

"And then?"

"Then Joel could not turn them out, if Annie won't have him."

"If? There is no further *if* on the subject—it is settled, she never will."

"Out they must go then—or the money must be found somehow."

"Last resources, Mab, are terrible things! Excluding all hope, but one, if the last frantic throw turn up a blank, what's to become of us?"

"You must toss out a rope to the drowning man, my dear brother, to save him from going down, if you can? What surer warrant for that, than your own heart?"

"Yes, *if*—but if not, better he went down, than lugged another in after him to the bottom, to no use."

"We cannot always stand on the brink, and so reason—especially with those we love?"

"It seems not. Has Clement the slightest idea of what you are thinking of?"

"No more than that rolling stone, that I know of."

"Why not ask him, first?"

"With his epic notions? Do you think that is the way to lay *him* under everlasting obligations?"

"Well, do as you think best. There is one comfort,—if I can't cheat Joel—can you?"

"He cannot refuse me my own?"

"On what terms did he take the money?"

"Clearly, to refund it at three months' notice."

"Ah, then, rest assured, you won't get it sooner."

"Won't that be soon enough?" and Mabel turned pale as ashes, as the thought flashed across her, "what, by then, Joel's revenge might goad him on to do?"

"Let us hope so; or, rather, that before then, Sir Hugh will see the impossibility of his keeping up an expensive place like The



Rookery, and come to some terms with Joel, and wash his hands of it; and have done with those insane bubble schemes, and go and live, within his income, somewhere else in peace."

It was indeed a forlorn hope to trust to! and Roland knew so as he spoke; but there was no help for it then, but to find all the consolation from it that they could. Just as they had determined on which, a rustling among the firs and rhododendrons drawing Mabel's attention to the spot, there was Clement's jocund face, with all its cares, glaring at them, from behind a clump, as if to say—"Thank you, Miss Yorke, for forgetting who has been on tenter-hooks of unspeakable impatience, on your account, for nearly twenty minutes, and you said you would not be away ten; and when we shall ever again have speech of each other, after that horrid, dark, dirty, dismal old door of Yorke House is shut on you, who on earth can tell? But, of course, *you* don't care!"

Possibly, Roland thought she did. And so, as he wanted to say a word to the Colonel

and Mrs. Ferrand, he "would give them a quarter of an hour's grace, before they said good bye, in the which, if they made the most of it, quite enough of the affairs of the nation might be settled between them, and time to spare, for Miss to put on her bonnet and shawl and be ready, with her band-box, to a moment."

As this, in effect, was cutting Clement's last chance down to little more than five minutes, before, if Mrs. Ferrand drove them in, he would have to re-cross the heath, with either a heart as heavy as lead or as light as a feather—the question was, could Clement spell that all-important word *opportunity*, or not? The chances were, if Clement had had ten minutes, instead of five, wherein to seal his fate, for weal or woe, half of it would have flown away, shivering on the brink of his Elysium or his Hades, when a bold plunge would have landed him safe enough, just where he wanted; and, though pressed down with troubles that would have overwhelmed nine-

teen men out of twenty, brought his buoyant spirit to the surface again, like a cork, which there was no keeping under, and made him the happiest creature living in a moment. But as he well knew the sort of person he had to deal with, in Roland, and that fifteen minutes with him, were not sixteen, if he could help it:—

“I say,” began Clement, as soon as Roland had disappeared; “what a time you have been! But then of course *you* haven’t been counting the seconds?”

“Why so impatient always?”

“Lots of opportunities haven’t I, to say how d’ y’ do—good bye?”

“You don’t ask me after the cold I almost caught last night, looking at the moon with you at the gate there.”

“No, I’ll be hanged if I thought of that! Couldn’t I have kicked myself, going home.”

“Good gracious! why?”

“Just as if you don’t know. I say, Mabel?”

“What?”

"How long will it take you to put your shawl and bonnet on, and those things in your box?"

"Not more than six minutes."

Clement looked at his watch. "Confound it! then I have got only five minutes more."

"Can't you ride in with us?"

"Not if Mrs. Ferrand drives you, which she says she will. We must say good bye now—for how long?"

"Till Joel is well again," and it was uttered in so sad a tone, at least so Clement thought, that "she loves me," he said to himself, as her eyes fell on the turf, and "come what may, I'll out with it:"

"Mabel."

"Well."

"You don't know how miserable I am! downright miserable!"

"I must own you have some cause for anxiety."

"I can't stand it, so I tell you, any longer."

"I don't wonder at your feeling depressed. I know I do."

"You do?"

"What would you think of me, if I did not? *You* are a man, and must have courage, and up and face it, like one!"

"Ah, those horrid affairs! I see what you are thinking of. Mabel?"

"I really must run in now—the ponies are coming round."

"No, by heaven! you shan't though, till you have told me one thing."

"Make haste then."

"Mabel, I could have the courage of a lion—I could go through fire and water—I feel I could move mountains—do anything—if—"

"What?"

"You loved me one-half as much as I love you!"

"Would that suffice?"

"No, no! I say, Mabel, dearest Mabel! speak. We have but a minute or two longer. Do you—do you love me, Mabel? Will you be mine?"

"And live in an ivied cot? On what?"

"Is not the New Epic nearly finished? and the whole of the second edition as good as bespoken? Furthermore, shan't I have a private fortune of Five Thousand and more, in less than three months, all my own? every farthing of which I could settle on my wife, you forget that."

"No I don't."

"If it were Fifty Thousand, instead of Five, you know whose it should be!"

"I can fancy."

"Well, and—is that all you can say in return?"

"You are so impatient! I was going to say, you know I am a Yorke, born, bred, and brought up one. Very well, then, suppose, before I give you any positive answer, you shew me the Five Thousand, in hand; and then I will shew you Four more. How much would that be together?"

"Five and four—nine, wouldn't it?" and a mist came over Clement's sight for a moment, as he was casting it up; during which Mabel, seeing the Colonel and Roland in the distance,

looking about for them, disappeared. Nor was it till he squeezed her hand so hard that it brought the tears into both their eyes almost, as Mrs. Ferrand whipped off, and the Colonel would only be consoled by the promise of their speedy re-union, which Mabel assured him "she was no less pining for than himself," that he solved the little problem contained in the simple addition sum she had given him to do. The which mastered, as a curve of the drive hid her from his sight—talk of a lion! shew Clement Walcot all that day, and the next, and the next,—till, not seeing her shadow on the staircase once all that time, he got a little dejected for an hour or two,—the task, within human possibility, that would be too much for the giant-strength he felt in him!"

## CHAPTER III.

## RALPH AND 'THE FOUR WHEAT-EARS.'

WE said that while Roland was sitting by the sick bed-side of his brother Joel, at Yorke House, the Vicar of Millford and Mary his daughter were at Rexford, on some special missions of their own. Wherefore, we must now invite the reader to accompany us once more into the County Gaol, therein situate, where Mary Grey, in Betsy's cell, and her father, face to face with reprobate Ralph, performed their parts in the little home-drama we are writing some scenes of, to the best of their power, and in the way they conscientiously considered it their duty to do.



With what passed at that affecting interview between Mary Grey and her fallen 'sister,' this story concerns itself no further than to say, that, though Betsy was to be tried for child-murder next day, there needed no additional asseverations from her, of her entire innocence on that charge, to assure Mary that she was not guilty. And with regard to that contrite spirit, the true worth of which remained to be tested, when, the present dread removed, the opportunity to sin again was given it, Mary had good hopes of a rich harvest from the seeds already sown; for they had taken root, evident root, in a soil that, though poor enough, and in parts stony and full of weeds, shewed no irreclaimable disposition to be redeemed, if only any firm and kindly hands thought it worth their while to try what could be done with it. Aye there was the secret of it all—stony and full of weeds, but NOT IRREDEEMABLE, if any Christian care and kindness would take it earnestly in hand and see what could be done with it. 'Go and sin no more.' That was not saying, be-

cause you have sinned, you are lost. That was not saying, because you have fallen, there is no help for you. 'I came not to call the just, but sinners to repentance.' Was that telling the sinner to despair? Was that an authority for them to cast stones at her? to drive the soul, in sin, out of the body, by their brutal blows, into the presence of its Maker, unatoned for by one act of its own, which a little more breath, yet permitted it, might have given it time for? Then, 'I delight not in the death of the wicked. Why will ye die?' Was that saying, why do you not kill? Caught in sin, hang them up, get rid of them, away with them, body and soul—unless God be more merciful than man—to perdition. They are none of mine, I will not have them?

Such, at all events, was the creed in which Mary Grey had been taught by her father to regard a subject, to the faithful discharge of his duties to which, as a Christian man and sinner himself (to what extent Heaven best knew) he devoted his whole heart and soul. He deemed it an unjustifiable act on man's part, to

shed man's blood. He found no warrant for it in scripture. On the contrary, all Christ's precepts and practice leaned to life, not to death, and giving the sinner every chance to save his soul alive. In many instances, where the law would have killed, He saved. He was continually stepping in between the culprit and the judge. 'There shall be joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-and-nine just persons which need no repentance.' What did that mean? Joy in Heaven! By what standard did heedless man measure the fullness of that burst of triumphant exultation of the Angels, over the admission of *one—one single* redeemed soul into Heaven's gates? And by the same heavenly love and pity and mercy and long suffering, was there to be no cry of grief and indignation from them, when, by man's ignorance and ill-judged haste, they were robbed of their dearest treasures? He said, 'Thou shalt not kill.' But he said not, If thou dost, thou shalt be killed. Cain struck his brother down to death with a club, but God let him live. He could

have smitten him, if He had pleased, cut his breath off in an instant, but He dealt not thus with the fratricide. Nor may we cut off the soul, in sin, with a blow, from its only hope, its last chance of fulfilling the end, however dark and tortuous the way to it may be, in man's sight—the end for which God made it, and which Christ Himself has said, ‘will give most joy of all to the angels in heaven.’

Arnold Grey sat with his daughter talking to Betsy for more than an hour; when pressing her hand, in token of his satisfaction with the progress the good work had made so far, he bade Mary remain where she was till he returned to her; and going straightway to Ralph, obtained permission, as before, to see him alone for half an hour; and face to face together, the Vicar lost no time in bringing the conversation to the point he wanted:

“I am glad to see you looking so well, Ralph.”

Ralph felt himself getting thinner, on the prison diet; and wanting his dinner, which

would not be ready for three-quarters of an hour, was not as disposed as he otherwise might have been, to respond to the Vicar's congratulations on his improved looks; wherefore, he only smiled faintly, and squeezing his seal-skin cap between his knees, kept his eyes on the stone floor and remained silent.

"When I say looking well," explained the Vicar, putting his hat down by his side and crossing his knee sociably; "I mean you look happier—not so angry with all the world and yourself, as you were when I was here last. Am I right? I hope so."

"Not much, as I know of, to be happy about here," muttered Ralph, evading the question; but still in a tone that encouraged the Vicar to predict well of the little book-gift he had placed in his hands, and the earnest prayer that accompanied it.

"There I differ with you, Ralph."

"Do you?" and Ralph raised his eyes and stared at his Reverence, as if he thought he must be joking.

"Yes, entirely. I mean what I say. There is a great deal to be happy about, if you feel so, even in a place like this."

"Horrid!"

"I see nothing horrid in it, if it make you happier than when you came in."

"Not, if you can go out when you like."

"Well, that makes a difference certainly. Only, it's as well, if the physic is doing you good, not to leave it off too soon. Honestly now, just answer me this—you're a pluckier fellow, arn't you, a precious deal pluckier than that day, don't you remember, when you funk'd standing up, like a man, and taking a turn with yourself? having a tussle, I mean, with that devil of a fellow in you? That was chicken-hearted, if you like!"

Ralph laughed.

"Yes, well you may blush! Let's see the Book I gave you."

Ralph drew it out of his fustian pocket.

"Hollo! here's a great thumb mark! so there is—ah, and here's another!" cried the

Vicar, turning over the leaves,—“another, too, that’s well! And you dare, do you, to look me in the face, and say you are not happier, a million times happier, than when the policeman handcuffed you there at ‘The Jolly Cocks’ in Brick Lane?—a pretty place for a respectable character to be seen in!”

Ralph grinned.

“Own it—you’re a better man, by half, than you were then?”

“Where’s the good, if I be?”

“What do you mean?”

“Tell ’em so, who’d believe it?”

“Tell them nothing. Actions prove themselves.”

“A man can’t starve, though.”

“He ought to, if he won’t work.”

“Many do, that would—but can’t no-how.”

“Why not?”

“Because they can’t.”

“Why?”

“Because who’ll employ ’em, if they would.”

“Why not?”

“Because—”

"Ah—it's easier to get a bad name than to lose it? That's true."

Ralph heaved a deep breath, and rounding his great broad shoulders, sat forward with his cap grasped hard in his hands, and the old spirit tearing at him visibly."

"Just answer me this," went on the Vicar, reading his thoughts. "Supposing you had lost something valuable, something you didn't know the worth of till it was gone, you would look about you, wouldn't you, and try and find it again?"

"Where's the good, if I couldn't drop on it no-how?"

"How could you be sure of that, till you tried?"

"Humph!"

"Oh, you speak from experience, do you?"

"Humph!"

"You had a good character once—I know you had—as good as any young fellow in Millford. What made you lose it?"

"Little enough."

"Ah, that's always the way—step by step



—that's how they come here at last. Began by setting a snare for a rabbit, I shouldn't wonder, nothing more? Let's see, you were not quite seventeen, were you, when you got into that scrape at Lyncourt?"

"For taking them four wheat-ears out of the Rector's five-acre field, next the toll-gate?"

"Was that all, Ralph?"

"So help me God!"—

"Hush! I want nothing more than your own word. If that's not enough, no appeal to Him can avail you. The simple truth may."

"Then, may I never stir from this spot alive," said Ralph, sitting up and meeting the Vicar's earnest study of the man, under suspicion, with an unflinching eye and cheeks flushing scarlet; "if they didn't give me a month, for taking them four wheat-ears."<sup>2</sup>

"Oh!"—and the Vicar's brow was overcast for a moment or two,—“gave you a month for that, did they? What here, in this gaol? I was away at the time.”

\* A fact!

"Yes."

"And was it your first offence?"

"I won't say but what they owed me a spite, for snaring a hare that came at nights and ate the young cabbage plants and parsley."

"Whose?"

"Mother's."

"In your own garden?"

"Yes."

"Was that where you caught it?"

"Yes, out side the hedge."

"Ah, alongside the wood? And you thought no one saw you, I suppose?"

"Bill Bloxam did, anyhow."

"Sharp eyes those of Bill's?"

"I believe you."

"Whose else's did you fear?"

"Nobody's."

"Was that my fault? How often didn't I tell you to come to church, afternoons as well as mornings, whenever I could catch hold of you?"

"Never once, as I recollect."

"Why did you shirk then? Why were you afraid only of Bill's eyes?"

Ralph looked down again.

"Can't you answer?"

"Yes, if I like."

"Shall I tell you why? Because you hoped Bill wouldn't see, and you knew He would, whose eyes, if you came face to face with them in his own House, your cowardly conscience dared no more encounter, than it dared face itself, like a man, the last time I was here, when you hadn't the pluck of a pigeon in you, and why?"

"Because I saw no good in doing of anything?"

"Is that what you have been saying to yourself ever since sixteen?"

"Howsomever, I never got over that month for the wheat-ears—that's it."

"Been going wrong ever since then, have you? with the brand on you? bad in your own eyes? shirking your church? sneaking about, nobody knows where? living from

hand to mouth, as you could? waging war with your best friends? and taking the worst enemy you had to your bosom? And what has he done for you?"

"Come to that, what did anybody else do for me, I'd like to know, after them wheat-ears? It was 'there he goes,' wasn't it?—'that reprobate Ralph—keep out of his way—there's no good in him—he's been in prison—he's a bad 'un—mind what you're at—have nothing to say to him.' How was a man ever to right himself that way, I wonder?"

The Vicar felt the full force of the appeal. It touched a never failing chord in his own breast, of which Ralph little thought, when, looking his Reverence in the face with a half-contrite, half-stubborn expression of mingled shame and self-exculpation, Arnold Grey rose from his seat, and putting something in the palm of his hand, which again brought the blood to the reprobate's face, tapped him kindly on the shoulder, and said:—

"Let that be an earnest between us, Ralph, of one thing—a mutual determination to thank

Almighty God for all His chastisements, and turn them into the blessings, and nothing else, that He intends they shall be to us, if we look at them aright, and profit by them as we ought to do. And now before I go, I want to ask you another question. You can answer it, or not, as you think proper. You are aware that your fellow-prisoner on the other side of the jail, Elizabeth Bond,—and I see the finger of God in it, Ralph, in thus bringing you both to punishment together, at the same time, and within the same iron bars,—will take her trial to-morrow, for the murder of her child. Much as she has fallen, Heaven send her an honorable acquittal on that dreadful charge! We have no doubt but she will sleep to-morrow night under her mother's roof."

Ralph's chin sunk on his breast, while great hot tears rolled down his cheeks.

The Vicar grasped his arm:—"Ralph, if you are the father of that poor babe in its grave—"

Ralph hid his face in his hands.

"I thought so—I was sure of it—yes, yes,—"

The great, broad, brawny chest of the reprobate heaved ready to burst.

The Vicar's was little less agitated.

"Weep on, man," said Arnold Grey, as well as he could control his voice; "such tears, with God's sanctifying help, will do more for you than many stripes. Ralph—hear me—one word more—Heaven's eye is on you—you will right the girl?—you will make her your wife, your lawful wedded wife, as soon as you come out?"

He grasped the Vicar's hand:—"Yes—yes—sure I will!"

"Good bye—Heaven bless you!"

But Ralph, as the Vicar stood at the door, had evidently something else to say, before they parted.

Arnold Grey looked at his watch.

Ralph looked at Arnold Grey through his tears, as if undetermined about something.

"It wants but a minute to dinner-time,"

said the Vicar. "You are hungry I dare say?"

"Best, then, wait till I'm out," muttered Ralph, passing his hand across his brows; "then I've something else to say—about—"

But the bell clanged forth its welcome summons to the common banquet—time was up. And again bidding farewell, as there was no help for it, the Vicar hastened to rejoin Mary, while Ralph went to his soup and dumplings, with what appetite he might; but with a sensation at his heart that he would not have exchanged for all the wealth of the world that day! Does the reader care to ask why? He had said he would right Betsey, and make her his wedded wife. And he had promised his heart its first unselfish pleasure when, he got out, viz., to go with her to the grave of their babe, and mingle their tears over it. He stood in his own esteem, as a man should stand, great or little—and the prison no longer looked 'horrid' to him, for he was at peace with himself so far. And could he but have told what else he had to tell the Vicar, before he left,

there would not have been a happier heart within the walls, not even pretty Miss Priscilla Barbold's itself. As it was, he had yet one other atonement to make, which hung rather heavily on his conscience, but which, make he would, as soon as he breathed the fresh air again ; and the good resolution helped not a little to astonish some of his fellow captives, with " what had come to Ralph Andrews now, to bring all those smiles on his face ?"

Going home, the Vicar, whenever Mary dropped into a 'brown study' of her own, kept repeating to himself, as Demosthenes, sage beast, found his way back, without whip or word, to his own manger—

"How wonderful ! how good ! how just ! how loving ! how merciful are God's ways ! Think of throwing a lad of sixteen into the pollutions of a jail, for picking four wheat-ears—to make an example of him ! Supposing it had brought him to the gallows some day—merciful Heaven ! what should I have felt, as his pastor ? Did I do my duty, as his minister, to that lad, when he first fell from



me? Did I do all I could? all I might? all I ought to have done? I knew he had strayed from the fold. What sufficient pains did I take to bring him back again? And the law laid its iron-hands on him, when he was but sixteen—what a judicial triumph! If his Saviour—mark the word—his Saviour had had the judging of that child, in sin, would He have thrown him into prison? Is that the way He would have reclaimed him, and made him an inheritor with the children of Grace? No, no! He would have gone and sought that which was lost; brought it back to Him, not cast it away; He would have opened his eyes to the error of his ways, and so worked on his heart by the Divine law, that it never would have transgressed man's again. What a triumph of Love that! And, thus dealt with, he would have followed Him, and Him alone, not from fear of man, but from love of Him; without which, jails may frown, and gibbets swim in blood, and Satan go on laughing at us, to see what blind fools we are, with all our Bibles!"

## CHAPTER IV.

## ANXIOUS MEETINGS AT THE OLD HOME.

NANNY GLYNN was not a little pleased to see Miss Mabel and her trunks at Yorke House. Nothing more cheering to the sick bed-side watcher, than the fresh faces of friends, of a morning, come to say, "Well, Nanny," or "well, Nelly, how is your patient? And how are you, too? Very tired, no doubt. Sit down, and let us hear all about it."

"Mr. Yorke had slept soundly from the time he closed his eyes, after recognizing Mr. Roland, to when the doctor came to see him about nine o'clock; and was so much better, that he could sit up without help; and had

eaten his breakfast with, for him, quite an appetite; and seemed to have no recollection of anything that had happened in the night; and had sent for Mr. Brockett, his lawyer, to come to him as soon as he could; but Mr. Potts had made him promise that he would not talk much, and would remain in bed all day, whether able to get up or not. He was dozing again then, and best not wake him."

"And you think he has no recollection of what passed in the night?" asked Roland.

"No more than that chair there," said Nanny, turning white. "It's my opinion he's no more conscious of the state he was taken out of the chaise in, than that table, and so I told Mr. Potts."

"And what did Mr. Potts say?"

"He hadn't a doubt I was right. It was a sort of stupor fit he was in, that's my opinion. God bless you! he knew no more what he was doing than that hassock, Miss."

"So much the better, Nanny."

"Isn't it? Yes, that's what I was telling Nelly—what they do in their sleep, those

sleep-walkers, is nothing to go by, you musn't take any notice of it at all."

"And he seems quite calm now?"

"Calm? yes, and as clear-headed and rational as you are, only dreadfully weak! There—it's my belief, Miss, if he got out of bed, he couldn't stand upright, it has shaken him so. Poor man! you never saw such a spectre as he looks! it's enough to make your heart bleed! and he used to be so plump and well! before," and Nanny hid her eyes in her apron. And there was a dead silence for a minute, during which, tick—tick—tick—went the old clock, on the staircase; which putting Roland in mind of this, that, and the other devolving on him, during the Vicar's absence, "He would leave them for the present, as the accounts were so favourable, and come in again by and bye, when he had done what he had to do; by when Mabel would have seen and had a sisterly chat with Joel, and heard, too, what Mr. Brockett thought of matters? and whether Joel wanted him about Sir Hugh's affair? and, if so, what turn that was

likely to take? and what effect Annie's rejection of him would have on it?"

And now all alone with Miss Mabel, old times came back again, and they had a long and heart-felt talk together, had Mabel and old Nanny, about many more things than there is space for in this story. Of her "poor dear old master!" Nanny talked but little, for it was too sad a theme; but of Yorke House, as it used to be in Nanny's younger days, and as it was now, she discoursed more freely. And Mabel sat and listened, with that pleased attention paid by a kind heart to old and faithful service. And Nanny unburdened her thoughts of what was just then especially weighing on them, viz., the new mistress, which Nelly declared "everybody said she would have at Yorke House before many months were over her head:—"

"It's my opinion, Miss Mabel, that's what has been preying on him for ever so long!"

"What, his quarrel with Sir Hugh?"

"Yes, of course. How could they ever be married, without her father's consent?"

"There is another difficulty, Nanny, besides that, I am afraid."

"Eh?—indeed?—nothing but cares and crosses, are there, for us poor mortals? Aye, aye, rich as well as poor? it's very wearying! What, Miss Annie taken to some one else, may hap?"

"Not exactly—but not taken to him."

"Mercy on us!" and Nanny clasped her thin bony hands together, as if inwardly thankful for something,—“hasn't she now? Well, if I did'nt think as much, when Ned Vickers took him, all of a heap, out of the chaise. I was sure, as I lived, that something had happened. Mercy on us! refused him, as she?"

"Given him no hope, I believe, which is the same thing."

"And," said Nanny, with an emphasis that showed how much in earnest she was—"God forgive me, if it's wrong, Miss Mabel, but I'm glad of it! glad as if anybody had given me twenty pounds!"

"So should I be, too, Nanny, but for one thing."

"It will cut him up cruelly, won't it?"

"Indeed it will!"

"They do say, some of them about Town," it won't be any the better either, if it don't come off, for Sir Hugh?" added Nanny, mysteriously.

"Do they say so?"

"Yes; and a deal more that's no business of theirs, the idle busy-bodies, minding every one else's affairs more than their own."

"What else do they say?"

"What matters what the jackanapes grin and chatter about? That's nothing to go by. Time almost they'd done minding other folks holes in their manners, and mended their own."

"Oh, and they are talking about the Walcots now, are they?" asked Mabel, carelessly.

"Now! When haven't they been talking of them any time these five years past? Enough to make them talk, living as they do, over head and ears in debt, and now driven so, they don't know where to go for a shilling, if Mr. Yorke won't lend them any more. It's pitiful, that's my opinion, to see your high

gentry folks like them, going about begging and borrowing, just as if they hadn't heads and hands to get their own living with, as well as other people. It all comes of pride, Miss, false pride, that beggarly pride which makes them all be trying nowadays to be cocking their heads, if they can, over each other, and the littlest bantam of the lot crowing the loudest. It's my opinion, Miss, that's at the bottom of their ridiculous 'high church' and 'low church' wicked nonsense! as if Christ has anything to do with their 'highs' or their 'lows,' further than how they glorify Him and The Father by it, not themselves, and their empty forms and ceremonies. It's quite an exhibition! some of those 'highs' make of themselves and their churches."

"About which let us talk another time, Nanny, if you please," interrupted Mabel. "You know I am one of the 'lows,' so may have my prejudices?"

"Lows!"—and Nanny's Christian smile had something so decidedly 'high' in it, that Mabel determined to discontinue the unprofit-



able terms from that hour,—“‘lows!’ Faith! and I should like to know what you mean by it? Anyhow, Miss Mabel, you can answer me this—what say the Scriptures? ‘The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Take not the high places in the synagogue. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.’ Ah, Miss, what signify the silly names we call ourselves, or each other? They all savour of the same salt. When we stand together, ‘high’ and ‘low,’ at the Great Bar, where justice will be done us, no fear of that—the ‘highs,’ in their own estimation, won’t be first, will they?”

“No, Nanny, nor the ‘lows,’ in their own esteem, either; but those only, who, *really* lowly in their own eyes, are ‘high’ in His—that will serve them best, no doubt of it.”

Nanny pondered it for a while; and nodding her head, seemed to have fully made up her mind to one thing, viz., that Miss Mabel was right; and that there certainly might be too much ‘low’ pride as well as ‘high.’ For which reason, “Best have done with such

rubbing distinctions!" she said to herself; and her bosom feeling all the lighter for the little confession it made:—"Now shall I go up, then?" she proposed smilingly, "and see if he's still asleep? And then Nelly can come down, can't she? and you can go and sit a bit with him, and cheer him up, poor man! for I'll warrant he'll be pleased enough when he knows you're here, and are going to stop with us."

Nanny's coming into the room, and bending over him to see if he was awake, roused Mr. Yorke from his slumbers; and sitting up, while Nelly arranged the pillows behind him:

"Such good news for you this morning!" said Nanny.

Mr. Yorke's eyes left the contemplation of his thumb-nail, and, meeting Nanny's, impatiently sought an explanation of so unusual an announcement.

"You won't let it flurry you, if I tell you?"

"Eh—eh—what—what do you mean?"

"Who do you think's down stairs?"

As there could not be said to be any visible

blood in Mr. York'e veins, as he sat propped up with pillows, with his fleshless features more pinched and pointed than Nanny had ever seen them, made doubly skeleton-like by the cotton night-cap drawn tight down over his ears and the angles of his hollow jaws, to shield them from the draughts,—to say he turned deadly pale, as Nanny spoke of some one being down stairs, in that mysterious manner, would convey but a faint idea of the ghastly hue that overspread his face and neck, while glaring at her, as if she had struck him a blow he was reeling from, and which had stupified him so, he must have time to recover his confused senses, before trusting his trembling lips to answer her.

At length:—"Down stairs? down stairs?" repeated Mr. Yorke, as if trying to collect himself; "who? what? what do you mean? do you hear? who? who?"

"Miss Mabel's come."

A deep sigh, as if of relief from the weight of some thought that troubled him, burst from Mr. Yorke's bosom, as lying back on his pil-

lows, the perspiration stood thick and cold on his forehead; while Nanny, attributing it to his terribly weak state, and the thoughts of Miss Annie's rejection of him, gave him some sal-volatile and camphor in water; which reviving him, she made the room neat and tidy; and then returning to the bed-side again:—

"I may go and fetch Miss Mabel up now, mayn't I?" she asked, smoothing the sheet over the counterpane, and putting a chair ready.

"How long has she been here?"

"This hour or more."

"Who brought her?"

"Mr. Roland."

"Where is he?"

"Gone his visits, as you were asleep; but is coming again by and bye."

"What made them come?"

"To see you, sure; as you'd have gone and seen them, wouldn't you, if they had been ill?"

"I'm not ill—not ill—who told them I was ill?—I'm not—I'm not."

“You were very poorly all night, and must keep quiet to-day, then you will be better to-morrow. Those late dinners don’t agree with you. They never did. No, nor with your poor, dear father! that’s my opinion,—smell the hartshorn,—he never went out to them, but they laid him up. Don’t you remember that day, when Miss Annie ‘came out,’ as they call it?—law, I do, as if it was yesterday!—well, they over persuaded him to dine with them at The Rectory, and didn’t sit down till eight o’clock—time then almost that he was in bed, poor, dear man!—and what was the consequence?—he kept his room for ten days after it, and you never saw such a shadow! as—”

Mr. Yorke pressed one hand to his head, while, with the other, he felt about for the smelling-bottle.

“Pains you still there, does it?” sympathised Nanny, putting the bottle in his palm. “Take a good sniff,—wait a moment, the stopper’s not out,—now sniff hard—harder! Law, how it used to refresh your poor dear father

when he was ill. If I live till a hundred, I shall never forget that night, when, after dining—mercy!’ and Nanny turned almost as ghastly pale as her master, as, with a hollow groan, he dropped the bottle from his hand, and, losing his balance, would have tumbled forward on his face, if she had not caught him in her arms, and so held him, by main force, from falling on the floor. Till lifting him back to his pillow, she tore down the bell-rope, ringing for Miss Mabel and Nelly to come up; for she thought he was dying, so corpse-like did he look, as he lay back, with his chin on his chest, and his arms hanging flaccid and motionless, and the froth on his lip, as she had seen it many a time on the lips of the dying, just before the death-struggle.

No, Joel Yorke’s hour was not yet come. Old Nanny was an experienced nurse, as well as practically versed in sundry other needful matters, appertaining to good housekeeping, but in this instance her fears were premature. And, moreover, it must be acknowledged that that ‘opinion of her own,’ which Nanny, like

many greater folks than she was, prided herself rather more on than was always praiseworthy, led her into error, in the particular case under notice; for, if she had thought for a moment, she never would have alluded to so painful a subject as his father's sufferings, whether of body or of mind, in Mr. Yorke's then ticklish state; her doing which, is the best commentary that can be offered, on the indiscretion of those who, like Nanny Glynn, having an 'opinion of their own,' often make 'the very best intentions' the mistaken pretext for doing a great deal of mischief.

Mr. Yorke, though frightfully spare of flesh, had an iron frame, and after lying as if lost to all sensibility for nearly an hour, he shook off the benumbing drowsiness into which he had fallen, since Nanny laid him down again, and opening his eyes, an exclamation of pleasure, on their encountering his sister's fixed affectionately on him, showed how pleased he was to see her! and returning the kiss she gave him, he sat up and seemed quite himself again; and, though too weak to talk much, glad she

was there; and still more so when she told him, "that hearing he was an invalid, she had brought her trunks with her, and meant to stay with him till he was quite well again."

"How did you know I was poorly?"

"Some one told Roland, and he told me."

"When?"

"This morning."

"Who told Roland?"

"The Vicar, I believe, who heard of it, by accident, from some one coming from the town. No wonder such an evening was too much for you, never stirring from home as you do—I thought it would be."

Joel breathed heavily, and lay and looked vacantly at his thin white hand on the counterpane; then at Mabel; then at his hand again; then at her, as if there were something he wanted to say, but hardly knew whether he would or not.

Mabel understood her brother Joel pretty well; and reading his thoughts, let him follow the current of his own whim, which she made sure would shape them into words far better



than if she manifested any anxiety about them.

At length, resolved seemingly, he grasped up a handful of the counterpane tight; and, though Mabel could see the struggle within him, measured his words out as slowly and calmly, apparently, as if he had been discussing some one else's pressing affairs instead of his own.

"When do you return to Rexford?"

"When aunt Poynts comes to fetch me."

"I thought she was to stay with you at the Hall for a fortnight?"

"So she will very likely."

"And then you'll go back?"

"If you are quite well, yes—though—"

"What? what?"

"Annie Walcot wants me to spend a week with them at The Rookery, if aunt will let me."

A dark shade passed over Joel's face; then a derisive smile curled the corners of his mouth, as clutching up a fresh handful of the counterpane, he seemed to be steadying him-

self, before going on any further with the perilous task he had ventured on, and would go through with, if it cost him his life.

"Oh, want you to spend a week there, do they?"

"I doubt whether I shall be able this time, whether aunt Poynts will spare me so long away from her. She says 'she's so dull, the Cockatoo even won't talk to her.' I shan't be able to go now I daresay," and spite of herself, a scarcely audible sigh escaped Mabel, as dropping her lustrous black eyes on the floor, she sat, till Joel spoke again, unconscious how that sigh was being interpreted by her brother; and little thinking of the terrible resolve it had determinedly brought him to, and which he was now considering how best to find words for, so as to give it the appearance of a mere matter of business, rather than one of self-feeling of any sort, to which she would naturally attribute it, knowing most likely as she did, what had passed between him and Annie Walcot the evening before,

and what must be his state of mind, in consequence.

"Not go there at present, you think," said Joel, weighing the words, as they fell faintly from his lips, as if guarding them from any undue impression they might create. "The chances are—you won't."

Mabel looked up; and Joel's keen glance from his hand to her up-turned face, saw the blood leave her cheeks, as drawing her chair a little closer to him, she leant on one elbow, and fixed her eyes on him with an expression of such anxious tenderness, that for a moment or two it seemed to unnerve him; but if so, he was steadied again the next instant, as the thought of that sigh occurred to him, and—what is implied and how little his sufferings had to do with it, and what a triumph it was to him! to be master of all events, the power to shut the money, or not, as he pleased, to create them to beguile and set him at nought, with all his weakness when he could crush them with a word if he chose—yes and would, as

sure as there was breath yet left in him! before another eight-and-forty hours, if they rejected the last chance held out to them—the only hand, ha! ha! able and willing to save them from ruin.”

“You are fatiguing yourself too much, I am afraid?” said Mabel, affectionately. “You must want something to eat. You have taken nothing but a cup of tea to-day, Nanny says. Have a little broth now? There is some ready, if you like it?”

“I am not hungry.”

“But you are very weak, and ought to have it. Do?”

“Bye and bye. That’s not what I want.”

“What would you like better?”

“To see Brockett.”

“Does he know you want him?”

“If Nelly went. I told Nanny to send her.”

“No doubt she did then. Why not have some broth first? it would do you good.”

“Good!” and Joel’s eyes took a wandering circuit of the room; till resting again on his

thumb nail, which he took from his teeth—as the blood stained his lips so, he was obliged to let Mabel wipe it off with her handkerchief—he shuddered. Then smiling bitterly :—  
“He’s rich, isn’t he, that Gracechurch?” he added, with a heave of the chest, and a low moan, so spirit-broken, that it filled Mabel’s heart with grief, and her eyes with tears; not to fret him about which, she got up, and passing an arm round his neck, kissed his cheek, as she whispered, “Why let that trouble you? I hoped you had long ago given up such an idea. It would not be for the happiness of either of you. God knows best. He orders it all for our good. That is what I say to myself, when disappointments come, and what I find more comfort from than anything else. And so will you, Joel, mind what I say—if—if—”

But Mabel was but woman. And it occurring to her as she spoke, “How she should feel, if some one came suddenly, and told her that Clement was lost to her for ever, and that it was all for her good, that he should adore, and

be married to, another, and not to Mabel Yorke, who loved him dearly, so dearly, that the thought only of parting with him for more than a few days made her miserable!"—she dared trust her voice no further; so sat down again, "hoping Joel would not observe how full her heart was, and how she deeply pitied! all the time she was encouraging him to bear his sorrows manfully."

Mabel need not have taken any pains to hide her tears from Joel. He was too busy with his own sorrows, to give heed to any others; and pursuing the one idea, went on from where he left off, as soon as Mabel was seated:—

"And an only son?"

"Yes."

"And master of means enough to marry, if he choose?"

"No doubt."

"So much the better for them."

"Why so? What is he to them, Joel?"

"We shall see."

"How do you mean?"

"They will want a friend before long," and Joel's lip quivered.

"My dear brother!"

"And whose fault, if they do?"

"Their own—we know it. But that is not the way friendship talks; nor the way your own heart really looks at it, I am sure."

"How would you have me look?"

"As—as Annie deserves you should."

Joel's jaw fell, as, grasping up the bed-clothes again, a cold trembling seized him, and the words on his tongue died away in his throat unuttered.

Mabel thought she saw a chance of touching his heart:—

"You will not refuse them, Joel, the money they want now? If you do, what will become of them?"

Joel's eyes, sunk as they were in their sockets, sparkled again at the thought of his wealth!

"Why come to me? Business is business. Friendship? Pshaw! Much of that I should

have, if they didn't want me—if I had no more to lend them? I can't lend money for nothing. I've lent too much already. The place isn't worth any more, and I shan't lend any more on it, that's flat! What do any of them do for me, I should like to know? Haven't I offered to shake hands twenty times, and what have I got for it? Do you suppose I don't see the meaning of it? Do you think I'm so blind, as not to understand how it is he has treated us like dogs! ever since he was knighted? And, come to that, what was *his* grandfather?"

"My dear brother, how foolish—how wrong—how unjust of you—how cruel towards yourself, in your present weak state, to anger and excite yourself so! What will the doctor say?"

But Joel's rejection of the night before, or what he took to be so, was tugging and tearing at his heart, and he must out with the pent-up burning flood, though it killed him.

"What would Spencer Walcot,"—and at the name, Joel turned ashy white,—“the poor



sculptor of The Broadway have done, without that Ten Thousand Pounds left him by our house? It was the making of them. And the Walcots to take the wall of the Yorkes—what next? Been the way with them always. And now see—I may suffer myself to be kicked like a dog! by them, and lend them money, to turn on me, and drive me into the gutter, when they can get no more out of me? Yes, and they shall do it, shall they?”—and the hollow laugh with which it was said made Mabel tremble! —“do it with impunity? Make use of me, as long as it suits them, and then spit at me, when I ask for my rights? We shall see soon.”

“Joel,” said Mabel in a tone so impressively earnest! that it brought a momentary flush into his cadaverous cheeks; “if I did not know that you are ill in mind, as well as in body, and, therefore, that by and bye you will blush as much at what you are saying, as you seem to glory in it now, I should be very angry with you. Indeed, I don’t think I could love you at all. But I make all due allowances. You will think differently when

you are better. Even if what you say were true, which it is not, to return good for evil is a sweet privilege, Joel, the sweetest of all revenges! But let us talk no more of these things to-day. See how you have excited yourself, and how cross Mr. Potts will be with me when he comes; and you know how he praises me for being such a good, quiet, careful nurse. I have precious proved it, haven't I?"

But Joel was too exhausted to answer her, except with a faint smile, which flitting across his face, like the transient gleam of a passing dim light through a dark cell, on came the deep gloom as settled as before. And Mabel sat and watched him as he dozed off again, with a weight at her heart she had never felt before; and which, reason with herself as she would, got heavier and heavier, the more she tried to convince herself "how silly and useless it was of her to give way to it."

Mr. Yorke's sense of hearing was very acute. When a boy, his mother used often to say, "however fast asleep he might be, if she crept

like a mouse to his bed side, he would hear her before she got there; and the trouble they had to keep the house still enough, when he was ill, though no one but herself and Nanny were in it, no one could tell."

Mabel sat watching her sick brother, pleased to see him, as she thought, sleeping so soundly; when:

"Who's that?" asked Joel, starting, and raising himself on one elbow, as the tinkle of the street-door bell caught his ear; and out burst the cold sweat again all over him, so that Mabel was obliged to fasten an old shawl of hers round him, he shivered so.

"Mr. Brockett—I hear his voice," said Mabel, pinning the shawl close round his neck. "There, isn't that comfortable? Mind, you mustn't take it off till you're warmer. Better have a cup of broth before Brockett comes up?"

"No—not yet—by and bye—when he's gone,"—and having heaped up the pillows behind him afresh:

"I will go and send him up now, shall I?"

said Mabel, pulling the bed-clothes straight. "And please," she added in a whisper, and with a kiss, by way of binding the bargain, "not to forget what will become—if you care for nobody else—of Annie, if you refuse them what they want? yes, and *must have*, you know, Joel, dear? or—"

"Out they must turn? Humph! And whose fault's that? Not mine, is it? They can stop in if they will. And do well—well!"—and his eyes flashed.—"But I'm not going to be made use of—treated like a dog! to *serve* his end, I can tell you—hold out my hand to him, to have it spat on—that's likely, is it?"

"My dear brother, is this thinking and talking like yourself? Do look at it in the right light. You know, as well as I do, the cause of the coldness there has been between you and Sir Hugh ever since our poor dear father's death."

Joel trembled violently, so that the crazy old bedstead shook under him.

"It pains you dreadfully, to allude to it," went on Mabel, holding the smelling bottle

to his nostrils; "and so it does me, quite as much! but, with all our regard for ourselves, let us be just. But for that unfortunate bill affair, we should have been the same good friends together, as we were before it happened; but what had Annie to do with that? Nothing. You know how it grieved her, and what she suffered from it for a long time? And now, can you blame her for acting as she is doing, after so many years' separation, and terribly involved as they are? No, you cannot, Joel, if you are just—if you will only look at it, as I said before, in the right light, and not let your anger run away with your better feelings."

"Involved!" caught up Joel, impatiently glancing towards the door, now he knew Mr. Brockett was below. "Whose fault's that, I say? They needn't be involved, if they choose to get straight. They shouldn't owe a shilling to-morrow, if——"

"If," anticipated Mabel, hearing Nanny's step on the stairs, "Annie would consent to, what her father would never agree to, if it

were to save him from the jaws of a gaol ; so, what's the good of thinking of it?"

"And why not consent?" muttered Joel, feebly, as the dark cloud overspread him again. "Do you think I don't know why? That'll do—I can't talk any more. Tell Brockett to come up. If he *will* go to the dogs, it's his own fault, not mine;" and, sinking back exhausted, Mabel saw that all further expostulation or entreaty would be in vain then. And waiting a moment, to be sure she could leave him safely, went down to do her mission, with a face so full of care and woe, that Jonathan Brockett, attorney-at-law, steeled as he was by the courts, felt he had a heart in his breast, something like the same sort of heart that used to beat there, before he was articled to that eminent co-partnership in Yoxminster, before him, the Messrs. Wiley and Sligh ; and that "he was in for a job by no means calculated to make Jonathan Brockett stand in his own estimation—let alone Sir Hugh Walcot's, of The Rookery—as high as he ought to stand, as a gentleman, and a

christian man, as well as a solicitor—and with another world to come, after this, and a soul to be saved in it, or lost, as the case might be.” Which being rather a serious reflection, up went Mr. Brockett to his wealthy client, with a perturbed brow,—till the handle of his bed-room door was in his grasp,—when, smoothing the wrinkles, he stepped in with his usual sunny (be the times what they might) smile, and pressing the rich man’s hand in both his, was “greatly grieved! to see him in bed—grieved beyond measure!” And then drawing a chair close to his side—not even the cleverest eaves dropper in all Yoxminster could have overheard a word that passed between them, during the full hour they were closetted together, had he or she put his or her ear never so close to the key-hole to listen—they talked in so low a tone, and “that nasty troublesome old clock on the landing kept up such a tiresome ticking.”

Mr. Brockett could dissemble, if circumstances seemed to him to require it, as well as all the rest of the world. But if, on his return

to the parlor, where Miss Yorke was anxiously waiting for him, he thought that the mask he had chosen, not to alarm that young lady, was a good one, he was mistaken. It was perhaps as palpable a counterfeit as any one, 'learned in the law' was ever seen through by ; and well Mabel might look grave, when, tripping into the room, he spoke in so gay a tone, through the short cough that accompanied it, that she was sure there was mischief brewing ; and this conviction being come to the moment he shewed his face, and opened his mouth, it was no part of Mabel's candid character, when her heart was enlisted in anything, to disguise what she felt ; wherefore, there being no right reason on the present occasion for any mystification or reserve, that she could see,—at a juncture, too, when everything depended, in her mind, on a clear knowledge of the facts of the case,—she made bold to ask Mr. Brockett, to take a seat for a few minutes, just as he was going to take up his hat and be off.

The seat Mr. Brockett declined, with a



smile; but he had a new pair of trousers on, and handsome boots, and they looked very nice on the rug, as Mabel sat in her brother's arm chair, facing him; and glancing at his gold repeater, "I can spare *you* five minutes, before I return to the Town Hall," he said, gallantly; and was again "more concerned than he could express! to find Mr. Yorke such a wreck;" and I am grieved to add, so opposed to meet our wishes—Mr. Swivel's and my own—with regard to The Rookery business, which, no doubt, you know enough of, to be aware, what trouble we had with it on a former occasion? and which must really be amicably settled somehow now—or,"—and Mr. Brockett shrugged his broad shoulders and screwed up his mouth, in the way he always so frightened the poor souls by, to whom he was opposed, in the County Courts—"or"—

"You mean," anticipated Mabel, as the five minutes were getting on, "they will be turned out? I know all about it—my brother has just told me."

"In that case," rejoined Mr. Brockett, "I

need not add, how deeply grieved I am ! that nothing I can urge to the contrary, will 'induce him,' your brother declares, 'to alter his determination,—' ”

“ Which is ? ”—and Mabel gasped as if for breath.

“ As you are already aware,—and what can I do ?—as well try to turn the tides, as Joel Yorke, when his mind is made up,—to foreclose, and let the law take its course—unless—”

“ Annie Walcot will be his wife ? Then there would not be a shilling owing to-morrow, I suppose ? and he would settle—”

“ The Rookery on her, after her father's death, and half his wealth—not a farthing less than Three Hundred Thousand Pounds—which proves, at all events, how fond he is of her ! ”

“ And you are instructed to carry that to Sir Hugh ? ”

“ Yes—this very day, if I can.”

“ With what hope, on your own part ? ”

“ None.”

"Did you tell Joel so?"

"No. We see too much of givings-in at the last hour, from compulsion, ever to be either too sanguine or too despairing. It is a sumptuous bait!"

A bitter smile curled Mabel's lips.

"Sir Hugh is much pressed, I believe?"

"There are some arrears of interest, are there not, due to my brother?"

"Nearly as much as would swallow up the whole of the new loan proposed by Mr. Swivel, if paid off."

"Which they *must* be, I suppose?"

"I don't see how it could be done otherwise, even if your brother would advance any more, which he won't, he says."

"There's an end to that hope, then?"

"Yes, positively!"

"And if Sir Hugh should refuse, as he certainly will?"—and Mabel could not conceal from the practised eye of the lawyer the faltering of her voice, as she spoke with all the calmness she could command—"what will they do?"

"Heaven only knows!"—and again Jonathan Brockett shrugged his shoulders and screwed up his mouth, as he brushed his hat round with his sleeve. "I assure you, it's a very difficult question to answer, that 'what's to be done?' when money's wanted, and can't be got. How some of them answer it at all, as they do, I don't know. There's one thing, it's not a little will beat Sir Hugh. I never saw such an indomitable spirit as his. Nothing daunts him. There he is, running about now, as rich as Rothschild, with those Bacon and Cabbage Shares that he's wild about! What a pity, isn't it? By the bye, how's Clement getting on? His aunt's legacy will be coming to him soon. Time almost he turned to something. He's as nice a fellow as lives, when he's not in the clouds. It runs with the family. Spencer Walcot, the sculptor, was the only one of them that ever stuck to business, and he would have died worth double, if he hadn't been such a poet. Whatever you do,"—with a parting grasp of the hand, that filled Mabel's eyes with more tears than were

to be laid to the charge of *it*—"take a grizzle-haired old stager's advice—mind you, I'm not near grey yet—whatever you do, don't marry a poet, unless you can live on moonshine. Good bye. You love Annie Walcot, I know; and so do I immensely, she's a sweet girl. Ah, a thousand pities! We must see what can be done. Don't you long to be a rich woman? what good you'd do with it, wouldn't you? No knowing how Sir Hugh may come round. We lawyers never despair. Farewell. Magnificent day! to be stewed alive in a hot court? I shall run across to The Rookery after dinner, if I can. Good bye. Best say nothing of our conversation up-stairs—he's so terribly touchy!"

Mabel sat down again in Joel's chair, as soon as Nanny had shut the street-door; and never did the old house seem to her so dark and dismal as that day! She could scarcely believe it was the same in which she drew her first breath, and which, while her parents were there, to hallow and endear it to her, had been to them such a happy home! Now,

where find a vestige of what it was then? Ah, when the old heads are laid in their graves, what others can supply their places? Children and grand-children may fill the old chairs, and sit round the old fire-side, and collect round the old tables, and tell of by-gone 'antiquities,' and talk of better times; but the old home is with the old house, and that which made it what it is to us, and what it ought to be, and will inseparably continue—if we have hearts in our breasts worth the living flood that keeps them beating.—Where unto?—where we are fast hastening after it, and where we hope sometimes to carry, *in memoriam*, the young hearts, too, that we leave behind *us*, when they look at *our* old carpets, and rugs, and curtains, and chairs, and tables, and old fashioned fire-sides, and see those dear old forms and faces and undying smiles in them, to be found in none others—no, not if of the exact make and material that Royalty itself has, and wrought of gold or silver.

It was the old home to Mabel, as she sat

with dimmed eyes and swelling bosom, holding sweet, though sad, commune with her father and mother, while Nanny went up to Joel, to knit a little by his bed-side, while he was dozing; for there they both were with her, though not in person, in spirit, as much there, as if she could have got up and thrown her arms round their necks, and told them how dearly she loved them ! and, while her father lay back in his old arm-chair by the rug-end, facing the window, with his prudent glass of weak whisky toddy on the little claw-table at his elbow, there had been her mother, opposite, in her long-waisted brown poplin dress and stiff-frilled cap, with the purple and amber trimmings, and her snug black-velvet shoes, with the satin bows to them, on the old hassock by the table-side, peeping out so comfortably from under her gown, while she went on methodically with her needle, stitch, stitch, stitch ; as if, ' though it took her a hundred years to get through what she was about, so that she lived as long, what mattered it to Charlotte Yorke ?'

And for a little while, Mabel was lost in a

sort of trance ; during which strange sounds rang in her ears, and strange forms passed before her eyes, which bearing no resemblance to any one or any thing that ought to have intruded on her at that moment, an involuntary shudder crept over her, as the wind, whistling in from the folding doors, shook the crazy old baise screen so, that for an instant or two she could hardly divest herself of the idea that some one was behind it ; and turned her head, and watched it with a sensation of dread, while it lasted, that made her feel so faint and sick, a feather's weight would have overthrown her, brave as she was.

Then, "how foolish of me, how exceedingly foolish !" she said to herself ; - "as if I didn't know what a-to-do the wind always makes, when it comes up from the water ;" and drawing the screen firmer round on its legs, "I will go up now, and see if he's awake ;" and—"Oh, how I wish Roland would make haste and come ! I wonder how long he will be ? Hark ! what was that ? Nelly



come in, the back way—what a goose I must be! I don't think I could live here, all alone, as Joel does, for the wealth of the world—no that I wouldn't—hark!—there again!"—and throwing open the door, "Nelly—Nelly," called Mabel, under her breath; "come here, I want you—make haste!"

"Dear, dear, Miss—what's the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing—only I thought I heard something in the back parlor."

"Lor' did you? No, now, that couldn't be, for I was in there but half an hour ago, putting some poison in them holes for the rats. It's nothing but them daring vermin—they're so oudacious!"

"Oh, yes—very likely it was the rats—no doubt of it—it must have been—how silly of me!" and Mabel felt the blood come back into her cheeks—till they burnt so, for her cowardice, she was quite ashamed of them!

"You must be dying of hunger almost," condoled Nelly; "you haven't had a bit in

your lips since you came—that's what made you so pale, of course. I'll go and bring you in a bit of the mutton out of the broth, and a potatoe—it's all ready."

"I would rather have it in the kitchen a great deal! Nelly, if you please; then I can have a warm, too, by the fire? for—feel how cold I am"—holding out a hand,—“and a cozy chat with you?"

"Mercy on us! so you are! I'll soon put some sticks on, and have a nice blaze. If I'd only known it, when I went out, I'd have brought you in a drop of beer, too. Shall I make you a cup of tea?"

"Yes, there's a good Nelly! I should prefer it to anything else."

"Aye, I thought so. And an egg and a round of buttered toast. It's beautiful sweet Dorset as you ever tasted—just what your poor dear mother used to love so much. Lor! the many times she's come into the kitchen, and sat down, while Nanny or I got her a cup of tea and a new-laid egg for her dinner, when she was out of sorts ever, and been so sociable.

like and happy—don't it do one good to think of it, that's all!"

Yes, Nelly. And it did Charlotte Yorke good, too, be sure of it, to go, when so inclined, and take a cup of tea with you, and anything else good you had to give her; and to spread out her dress and have a nice warm by your fire; and look at the bright brass candlesticks and the shining pots, and pans, and kettles on the shelves; and ask kind questions, and receive kind answers; in short, it did her much good, Nelly, to be unto you both, more than a mistress, and to make you more unto her than mere servants. Wherefore, being 'sisters,' though very poor, two of you, in comparison—she had a kind mind that you should all of you be good friends, too. And you thought none the less of her for it, did you? and she has your heartfelt prayers for her soul's rest, now she is gone? And you loved her image, in her child Mabel, because you loved her? and there was nothing that day, when she was faint and cold, that you would not have done for her, that you

could, in remembrance of her mother? How proper, and profitable, all that pleasant homely feeling was between you! how creditable! how Christian-like! Else, would you have looked back to it as you did, so proudly? Mutual good-will and kind feelings, especially in conjunction with nice hot tea and toast, and new-laid eggs, and a bright fire when you are cold, how they warm, and open the heart, and call forth sympathies? and, in short, make even a Yorke House, with all its dismal and dolefuls, very tolerable quarters, for the time being, with such a clean, tidy, busy, bustling, honest, hospitable old soul as Nelly Finch, to do the honors?

“Is Miss Mabel’s tea to her liking?”

“It is delicious! thank you, Nelly.”

“Are the eggs too hard or too soft?”

“Thank you, Nelly, they are boiled to a bubble.”

“And the toast—if I had only known of it when I was out, to have brought in a bit of fresh butter—but Master never eats any but Dorset.”

“Which being just what I like of all things, Nelly, to-day, make me another little thin round,” said Mabel, “while I pour myself out some more tea; and then tell me all the news you know of, about all the people and everything else, since I have been away, there’s a good Nelly!”

And now in her glory, Miss Mabel had only to listen, and Nelly would have talked till twilight

It was wonderful what Nelly knew of her neighbours! But then people would stop and tell her this, that, and the other, whether she wanted them or not. Often it made her quite cross! but seeing it gave them such pleasure to be the first to communicate anything, she couldn’t find it in her heart to dash them; so she let them run on, though sorely tempted sometimes to ask them, “why they didn’t mind the holes in their own manners more,” as Nanny said, ‘before going about mending others.’ “Lor! Miss, if I were to tell you some things they say, the idle busy-bodies, you *would* be surprised!”

"Surprise me, then, Nelly, there's a good creature! if you can. It's so nice to be astonished, when you haven't, as my brother Joel says, to pay anything for it."

"I'm not so sure of that though," demurred Nelly, with a dubious shake of the head, as she re-filled the tea-pot for a cup for herself.

"I wouldn't say for certain what it might cost you, Miss, if all's true they're talking about somebody you know—somebody that hasn't been walking up and down opposite pretty well ever since you put your foot into the house, staring up at the windows quite wild-like! with a hat over his eyes not worth sixpence, for nothing—I saw him plain enough."

"You did, did you, Nelly?" cried Mabel, crimsoning, and checking herself—"somebody staring up at the windows, wild-like? and with a slouched, hat on? Good gracious, Nelly, there's no danger I hope?"

"Danger enough, if all's true that's said."

"Mercy! Nelly, you frighten me. Why didn't you tell me to come and have a look?"

I would have given sixpence to have seen him. Who or what was he like? ”

“ Young Mr. Walcot,” nodded Nelly meaningly; “ the image of him. If it wasn’t him, it was his ghost, that’s certain.”

“ There’s a pretty job then !” cried Mabel—  
“ a live ghost with wild eyes, opposite, staring up at the windows of Yorke House, in a slouched hat, and I indoors, and didn’t see it—call me lucky, do you? Oh dear! oh dear!” and running to the front parlour, Mabel peeped over the blinds; but, alas! no—she gazed up and down the street in vain—the ghost was gone. And with a sigh that had nothing very sad in it, however seriously she returned to Nelly, she sat down again so pensive! that Nelly “ was sure there was more meaning in those ‘ wild looks,’ with the battered old boat-hat drawn over them, in search of somebody or something they couldn’t find, than met the eye;” and, like a clever tactician, went on with her washing up without further comment, till it might please Miss Mabel to renew the subject.

"But you have not 'surprised' me yet, Nelly, don't forget that," smiled Mabel, brisking up. "I was in danger, wasn't I, of having to pay prettily for something? Turn it over as I will, I can't make it out. Oh, Nelly, you are so sly!"

Nelly laughed. She liked to be thought up to a thing or two—an enemy to busy bodies as she was.

"Yes, the slyest dear old Nelly I ever knew in my life!"

Nelly fairly chuckled at "the idea of such a thing as calling her sly. What next?"

"What have I done, pray," asked Mabel, archly, "that I haven't first counted the cost of? Don't you know I am a Yorke?"

"What, and—"

"Please not to stop in that abrupt way, Nelly—it isn't likely at my age that I've got the patience of Job."

"A Yorke? and because he can shew a handsome face, go and marry yourself to a pauper?"

"Dear me! is that what they're saying?"



About the ghost with the 'wild eyes, do you mean?" and Mabel clapped her hands. "You own he is handsome?"

"It's no business of mine," said Nelly, apologetically; "and you'll not take it as a liberty I hope, Miss—but they do say—"

"Ah, now you talk straight out, as I like, as a good, kind, dear old Nelly ought—what?"

"That in three months they won't have a shilling left, nor a home to go to—Miss Yorke can do better than *that* I should hope!" and the honest flush of family pride with which Nelly tossed down the napkin in her hand, and confronted her young Mistress, enough to say, "if you have no proper regard for Miss Mabel Yorke, of Yoxminster, I, Nelly Finch, who have worked for the family now, on and off, for best part of fifty years, have for her"—was so genuine a matter of fact, and a matter of genuine good feeling, too, on Nelly's part, that up jumped Mabel, and throwing an arm round her old neck:—"When I am married to him, if ever," she whispered, "I'll promise you this Nelly—you shall say it's the wisest

thing I ever did in my life. Yes, and you shall have a bran new silk gown of any colour you like, to go to the wedding in, and a cap all covered with white ribbons ; yes, and so shall Nanny, too—so there's a kiss for you, to bind it, as they say at market—hark ! who's that I wonder ? ”

Roland's pleasant “ well, how goes it now, Nelly ? ” as she opened the door to him, answered the question so entirely to Mabel's satisfaction, that he got two loving kisses for it, as they went into the parlour, one on each cheek. And then Mabel thought no more of the wind up from the water, or the shaky old doors, or the rickety old screen, or the rats, or the robbers, or anything else but the joy of seeing him back again ! to tell him all that had passed since he left ; and what Mr. Brockett had said ; and how she was “ nearly frightened out of her wits by an awful live ghost ! with wild eyes, and a slouched hat not worth a shilling on, that Nelly saw opposite, staring up at the window, for more than an hour ! ”

“ Yes, and I saw him, too,” smiled Roland,

"and a precious guy he looked ! with that vagabond old fishing hat pulled down over his brows, and sauntering along as if he hadn't a friend in the world."

" Ah, and what did you say to him, poor fellow !"

" I was crossing over to speak to him, but he waved his hand, enough to bid me 'not come too near a frantic man,' and bolted down Wool Street. Been trying to catch a glimpse of you, has he?"

" Yes, for a whole hour and more—and I not to know it ! There would have been no possible harm, would there, in my nodding to him over the blind ? though I wouldn't have let Joel hear of it for the world, he is so dreadfully bitter against them !"

" How it's to end, I can't think," said Roland, earnestly ; " I mean, I am afraid to think. The town's all in a hubbub about it."

" What ?"

" Annie's rejection of him."

" How can they have heard of it yet ?"

" They have, seemingly. Things get wind

in a country place, how, when, or where, nobody can tell. It's the talk everywhere. Very likely his returning home so ill in the chaise set it going. No matter about that—the point is, what's to be done?"

"Something *must* be, that's clear," agreed Mabel. "Joel is immovable; and Sir Hugh will never give his consent?"

"And if he would, without Annie's, what good would it be?"

"Ah, I agree with you—there's no doubt of it—she *does* like Mr. Gracechurch, so there's no use denying it."

"Who denies it?"

"I am not saying my catechism? Don't be so sharp! What a nice match that would be, wouldn't it? The Vicar always said she was made for a 'high' churchman's wife."

"'High' fiddlesticks! Don't talk such profane nonsense."

"I only copy my betters. They should set me a better example. You needn't be so up about it, though. What's Annie to you? Say

another word, and see if I don't tell Mary Grey."

"The truth—the whole truth—and nothing but the truth, if you please,—then I need have no fear at all. And Joel won't listen to reason, you think?"

"You can try if you like; he may listen to you; I have said all I can."

"Perhaps we had better say no more, then, till after Brockett has seen Sir Hugh? Another night's rest may calm his mind. I don't wonder at his feeling it, with his peculiar temper. It's a sad blow to him! We shall hear how matters stand to-morrow, and must then act as we best can. I am off now to the Vicarage, after I have asked him how he is, if he's awake. Can I do anything for you?"

Mabel heaved a sigh.

"You find it dull, I daresay," said Roland, passing his arm round her, and looking fondly at the tears swimming in her beautiful brilliant black eyes.

"I shouldn't care for that," sighed Mabel

again, deeper than before; "if there were any hope of things being amicably settled—and—"

"What—what, Mab dear?"

"Oh, nothing—I was only going to say—if there were a nice new book of any sort in the house, I could read, besides those old ledgers there."

"What sort of one would you like? I will send you a heap in, if you choose?"

"Yours are all so learned and dry."

"Will you have the 'last new novel' from the library, if it's in? I haven't the slightest objection!" smiled Roland, with a gayness very foreign to his real feelings.

"A novel!"—with a shudder—"from an immaculate shirt front and—white-choker's the word, isn't it?—like that. Oh, you atrociously wicked man!"

"Well, what shall it be then? Poetry is out of the question, I suppose?"

"Depends on what it is. Have you read Longfellow's last?"

"It's above my comprehension."

"Oh!"

"That's no reason why it should be above yours, is it?"

"If you think not,—ten to one, there's not a copy to be got in this stupid, hum-drum place, for love or money?"

"Unless Clement has one," silyly suggested Roland, as they went, with arms round each other's waists, up-stairs to Joel; "what will you give me if I ask him?"

"Six kisses—and three more on to them, if—if—"

"He will run in, the day after to-morrow, if he can find time, and gently ring the bell, very gently! at exactly eleven o'clock to a moment, eh? and say—if Nanny or Nelly open the door—'please give this to Miss Yorke;' but should it so happen that Nanny is here, and Nelly is there, and no one's in the way but Miss Mabel—how then?"

"Then, I suppose, silly, I must take in the parcel myself, and give it to Miss Mabel. And about the messenger who brings it—he will expect something for himself, won't he?"

"Anything you have handy will do very well. You must not keep him waiting. Of course, if a ring come to the door, you can answer it, if you are not too proud, and take in what there is for you, and drop anything you please into the porter's hand, and wish him good day, and good bye; and say it with a kind smile, too, which goes a great way, sometimes further than all the money you can give."

"Oh, you dreadful, horrible, wicked, good-for-nothing, naughty, bad, dear, kind, christian-like, considerate, do-as-you-would-be-done by, brother of mine! see if I won't tell Mary! see if I don't advise her, if she *must* marry a parson, to look 'higher' than a 'low' fellow, the like of Roland Yorke—recommending his sister, indeed, to read novels! and making clandestine appointments for her—as if she hadn't a soul to be saved, and Mr. Gabriel Gracechurch, the new 'high-church' curate, wouldn't hear of it. Hush! let me peep in first, to see if he's asleep."

No, Joel was awake; and Nanny thinking



of going down and making him a cup of tea. But he lay back on the pillows so faint and exhausted, that the words died away on his lips, with which he seemed to want to greet Roland, as he nodded to him, and returned the pressure of his hand, with, for Joel, more warmth than usually accompanied those two held out fingers, which was one more than anyone else got, his brother and sister being the only souls on earth to whom he extended the twain, and then not always, unless it quite tallied with his temper to be so liberal. Wherefore, seeing him so prostrated, Roland, after exchanging an affectionate word or two, motioned to Mabel to leave them alone together for a little while; and as soon as the door was shut:—

“Is there anything I can do for you?” asked Roland, sitting down on the bed, and speaking from the full heart of a brother to a brother.

Joel shook his head.

“I met Drayton. He said he had been up to you. What a lucky fellow you are! who-

ever else loses at market, Joel Yorke always wins, seemingly?"

Joel's chest heaved, and his eyes flashed!

"Though I don't think it's good for the heart to win always, far from it. I know when mine learns it's best lessons."

Joel raised his thumb nail to his teeth—"When?"

"When, strive as I may, I can't get what it sighs for most?"

Joel gnawed on in silence, with his gaze on his other hand.

"Because, then, I have to look elsewhere for motives, and actions, and rules of future conduct, and pride in myself, and faith in what's worth putting trust in; in short, it is then, Joel, if ever, I seem to come really face to face with myself, so as to know myself, and, with all my self-conceit, see what a poor, weak, vain, selfish, sinful soul I am!"

Joel shivered, though Nanny had pinned the old shawl again tight around him; and Roland thought he sighed.

"Let me read to you, will you,"—and Ro-

land drew a small manuscript note book from his breast pocket as he spoke,—“ read to you two or three solacing sentences from holy writings, which I always read to myself, when I want comfort, because I always find it from them in abundance ?”

Joel's lips moved ; but as he made no audible objection, Roland laid the note-book open on the counterpane ; and in the tone he thought best fitted for the ears to which he addressed himself, read, what, if the reader call it a ‘ sermon, out of place in a novel,’ may be, on second thoughts, which are best sometimes, he or she will agree with us, is *no where* out of place, if given and received in the spirit that reverently bows its head to Blessed Truths, told reverently, however inadequately expressed :—

‘ O God, how wonderful are thy ways ! how wise ! how ever just ! how full of mercy !

I was in sorrow and sorely afflicted, but I laid all my heart open to my God, through Christ ; and He has healed and made me whole.

I went unto God in my misery, and He came to my help.

Then I said, I will sing and give thanks unto my God ! for my heart was heavy, and now it is light ; and I will go and sin no more.

O God, how wonderful are Thy ways ! Thou bringest to honor, and to dishonor ; Thy eyes are everywhere ; Thou searchest the hearts of Thy creatures ; nothing is hidden from Thee.

Therefore will I sing and be glad ! because Thou knowest Thy servant, and will deal with him according to *Thy* law.

He was corrupt, was thy servant, utterly corrupt and wicked beyond measure ; but he went to his Saviour ; and though red as scarlet and more in number than the hairs of his head, His blood hath cleansed him from his sins, for he put his trust in Him.'

Roland would have read on, but a deep groan broke from Joel. And taking his cold hand between both his, for some moments he sat anxiously looking at his brother, without

uttering a word. Then Joel's lips moved again convulsively, as if he wanted to say something, but had no strength left; which Roland seeing, he rang the bell for Nanny to bring him his tea; and kissing his sunken cheek, and leaving him to God's help, as soon as Nanny came:—Mabel started, as she met him on the stairs; for she had never seen him so pale and thoughtful as at that moment, when, passing his arm round her waist in his usual fond way, he whispered her with a full throat:

“I have been reading to him a little, and he seemed to listen.”

Mabel stood on the door step till Roland was out of sight; and then sinking into the old arm-chair by the rug end, gazed confusedly round her; and burying her face in her hands, could control the torrent no longer, and burst into tears.

## CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH IS RELATED HOW JOEL YORKE PROPOSED TO SIR HUGH, THROUGH HIS SOLICITOR, FOR ANNIE WALCOT, AND WHAT ANSWER HE GOT.

ON his way to the Vicarage, Roland met Sir Hugh, cantering away on Daredevil to Woodcroft Cottage, Mr. Hervey Podge's pretty place, after a jovial visit he had been paying Mr. Jenkins. The Knight was in tip-top spirits! and, pulling up, gave Roland such triumphant accounts of the unprecedented call for shares in the New Grand Metropolitan Bacon and Cabbage Company, that, "if he bagged only a quarter of what *must* come to

him before six months, with common luck, according to Jenkins's calculation, he need fear very little any extreme measures that Joel might take, with regard to the Rookery mortgage;" and the thought of it was so gratifying to Roland, spite of his convictions to the contrary, that nothing would suffice Sir Hugh, but his promise then, and there, on that very spot, while he patted Daredevil's neck, "to think seriously, with the Vicar, before they allowed such a splendid opportunity of making a certain rapid fortune to slip through their fingers, an opportunity which, if you live for a thousand years!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, as he gathered his reins up, "take my word for it, you will never see again!" with which letting Daredevil have his head, off they were, master and horse—never were two fiery spirits better matched—full gallop on the road to—surely ruin could hardly have been it, as people said, with all those heaps of new crisp bank-notes which Jenkins had promised him, as good as in his pocket. And off went Roland, too, conning it over, to his plate of the Vicar's

mutton, and a stroll afterwards with Mary till the dew fell; "if he could get away from the Vicar, and Mary loved to count the stars and watch the autumn moon shewing her great round ruddy face over the purple curtain, peeping joyously at the happy harvest homes she had done her best for—as much as he did."

It was of all things what Mary loved dearly; especially if she had such a clever, entertaining reader of the stars for her evening companion as Roland, who knew most of their names by heart, and went so far sometimes as to quote the ancients, in support of certain almost incredible deductions he drew from particular conjunctions and co-operations among them, either propitious or adverse to the wishes of those who consulted them with becoming faith; and, like Roland and Mary, loved those sweet twilight communings, which made dear old mother earth none the less dear, because their souls, in union, soared away from her for a little while into other company; not to desert her, no, no! but to return to her—when the



Vicar's lusty, "where are you? come in, do you hear? the dew's falling, I want my tea," left no alternative but instant obedience—loving her better than ever, for their little wanderings.

And now while they drank their souchong, and Mrs. Bonney's nice hot tea-cakes, that Roland was so fond of, were winning her many compliments; and the Vicar, after having discoursed enough about Ralph and Betsy, and what he meant to try to do for them, was listening to the relation of what had happened at Yorke House during the day; and Mary was hanging with deepest interest on every word that Roland spoke, of his interview with Joel, and Mabel's ineffectual efforts to melt his heart towards them at The Rookery;—how fared Sir Hugh, after his gallop to Woodcroft Cottage and back, with the additional spur that little Podge's peering light grey eyes and wide-awake chin gave to the exuberant spirits he had been in all day! and which communicating itself on his return home to every one else in the house, brought the Knight, after

one of the merriest dinners he had ever ate in his own dining room, to his second bottle of claret,—just as Mr. Brockett, in accordance with his promise to Miss Yorke, pulled the hall door bell,—“as sure of at least £20,000, clear, by that day twelvemonth, as he was of—”

“Mr. Brockett,” announced Rennie. And having put on fresh glasses, and poked the fire into a blaze, Mr. Rennie rubbed his hands, on his return to the servants’ hall, and was so cheerful and chatty and humourous, that Mrs. Battles, the house-keeper, a fat, unwieldy woman, and fond as any one of her arm-chair and hassock, actually got up, quite young again, and pointed her toes, as the footman put his arm round the house-maid’s waist, for a ‘schottish,’ if Bob Acorn, the page, had only got his accordion, which he played beautifully! when it was mended, and the family weren’t at home! yes, jumped up and threw out her right foot, did Battles, quite saucily, so much so, that Mr. Rennie winked. But a dance just then being impracticable, under

the dining room, a glass of rum-punch all round was within the pale ; so, if they thought, up stairs, of having all the good things of this life to themselves, they were very much mistaken, that's all.

Mr. Brockett always smiled when he entered any one else's room but his own, for then he was very grave. He seemed as if he reserved all the smiles for others, and none for himself. Mrs. Brockett used to twit him about it sometimes, but never ill-humouredly, as " she knew that a solicitor had a great deal to try him, and put up with, if an honest man, and it might be a pleasant change for him to be natural for a little while, and give that poor ill-used conscience a holiday."

Sir Hugh was regaling his eye with the bright ruby-hue of the bumper-full he had just poured himself out from the claret-cruise, when Mr. Brockett made his appearance ; and putting the glass down untasted, glanced nervously at the countenance of the lawyer, as they shook hands ; and Rennie drew a chair round to the rug, in the position his experience presumed

was as pleasant as any that evening, for the little business *cum* pleasure *tête-à-tête* that had probably brought him there.

No doubt Jonathan Brockett knew his business, instructed in it as he had been by that eminent firm of the Broadway, Messrs. Wiley and Sligh, and reckoned on that sharp glance of Sir Hugh's at his face, as, with both hands held out, he might have been taken for a herald of glad-tidings, he smiled so! Evidently, it took Sir Hugh in, keen-sighted as he deemed himself; and so perfectly satisfied him that there was nothing to fear, no 'screw loose,' as he expressed it, that Jonathan Brockett had thrice filled his glass, and emptied it, before the Knight cared to look in the least curious, to come at the meaning of so unusual an honor as a call from so fagged a slave in harness as Mr. Brockett, at that late hour.

But Lady Walcot would be getting impatient; and as he filled himself glass the fourth:

"Smile as we do, as we are obliged to do, to get on at all, as times go," said the eminent successor of Messrs. Wiley and Sligh, with a

little shrug, and a twist of the mouth, by no means to be laid to the charge of the claret ;  
“ I do think we lawyers are the most unlucky dogs in the world.”

“ Ah !” and Sir Hugh rose, and seizing the poker smashed a lump of fizzing coal into a flame.

“ I call a man an unlucky dog ! who nine times out of ten is obliged, cruelly obliged, to say no, when he wants to say yes.”

“ Come the tenth time,” laughed Sir Hugh, gulping down a brimming bumper at a draught, “ how then ?”

Mr. Brockett consulted some memorandums which he took from his pocket-book :

“ I grieve to say that lucky tenth time has not come to-day.”

“ Ah—what—how do you mean ?”

“ I saw Mr. Yorke this afternoon.”

“ That was kind of you. Yes—and he is better, I hope ? An upset of the bile, wasn’t it ? He looked frightfully pale when he left.”

“ I was in hopes, by offering that one per cent. more, we talked of, to induce him to do

it, at once; but he's as stubborn as a rock—I can do nothing with him.”

Sir Hugh drew in his lips, and for a moment seemed utterly confounded; while Brockett peeled himself a pear, without a slip of the knife, so that the peel came off entire, which shewed what a clever, steady hand he had got, when he had a mind to prove it.

“Savage, eh?” muttered Sir Hugh to himself. “I thought he would be, when Annie told me!” and, loud enough for the quick ears of the attorney, “What the devil's to be done now?”

Mr. Brockett shrugged his great broad shoulders and screwed up his mouth so, that Sir Hugh broke out into a faint sort of feeling all over him; and till he had swallowed a glass of sherry, could hardly convince himself that the room was not swimming round with him, and that Annie's portrait over the mantelpiece was in its right place.

At length, after looking at it more steadily for a moment or two—“Says he won't do

it, does he? That means mischief, don't it?"

A smile curled Mr. Brockett's lips.

"Nothing to laugh at, Brockett, that I see," said Sir Hugh, flushing crimson.

"I was smiling, to think of something else I am instructed to tell you."

"Oh! From the same quarter? Out with it."

"It deals with a pretty round sum, too, short work as we may make of it."

Sir Hugh threw out his chest, and crossing one knee over the other, sat back and listened.

"First of all, I am afraid those 'botheration' arrears would have sucked up pretty well every farthing of what we could have done further, as I told Swivel; so it's as well, perhaps, as it is, as far as the place is concerned—if you wish to live in it."

Sir Hugh winced.

"How long he may let those arrears stand over, under the circumstances, no one can tell but himself. You know him as well as I do. He may allow them to go on, or not—who's to say what he may do? If you ask my

opinion—he won't. You must pay them, or—”

“Turn out? Go on.”

“In fact, he told me so. No use in mincing matters?”

“None.”

“Of course, I am now acting as a mutual friend?”

Sir Hugh bowed his head, in acquiescence.

“We lawyers have thankless tasks to perform sometimes.”

“I shall be much indebted to you,” smiled Sir Hugh, “if you will have the kindness—as the poor devil’s head, in the noose, said to (nothing personal I assure you) Jack Ketch—to be quick about it, and put me out of my misery.”

“Misery!” and Jonathan Brockett selected another pear. “I came charged to make you happy enough, if you choose.”

“Ah, your most obedient!”

“What say you to Joel Yorke, Esq., for a son-in-law?”

Sir Hugh started, as if he had been stung!



while the veins of his neck and temples swelled so, a little more and they must have burst.

"Wait a moment," interposed Brockett, going on leisurely with his peeling—"there, that's clever, isn't it?—Fact. I am in earnest. Without a shilling, some girls might, perhaps, ask for time to consider; but"—and the lawyer held the fruit he had all but got into his mouth, six inches or so from it, while, fixing his eyes on The Man of Straw, he thought "what a fool he was, to sit there with chest out and his legs crossed in that magnificent way! when the very clothes on his back were not paid for, and, the chances were, never would be, unless he sold his daughter to the most horrible man in the town, to save himself from a prison."

"But what, pray?" asked Sir Hugh, impatiently skaking his foot, and drumming with his fingers on the table, enough to say, "make haste, and let us talk of something sensible."

"I was going to add," replied Brockett, "that few of our Yoxminster belles would be very angry with anybody—though there

might be handsomer men in the world than the like of Joel Yorke, I don't say there are not—would be irreconcilably offended with him, if he fell in love with one of them; and would, on *yes* being said by Miss, and her Papa and Mamma, not only cancel all existing obligations, whatever they might be, but also execute a Deed of Settlement on the future Mrs. Joel Yorke, whereby she would, at his death, be entitled to, say, Three Hundred Thousand Pounds, as near as we can calculate."

"Is that all?" asked Sir Hugh, turning white, then flushing again redder than before, then white again, as snatching up the wine-glass he had just put down, snap it went at the stem, he handled it so roughly.

"What else he might do," placidly returned Mr. Brockett, "is more than I can say. Anything, everything in his power, I dare vouch for it, that Miss Annie Walcot could wish."

"Your instructions only extend to the cancelling of The Rookery mortgage and arrears, and a deed of settlement, on marriage, I think

you said, of Three Hundred Thousand Pounds, or thereabouts, if I will give my consent to their union, presuming he has hers?"

"Just so."

"And you desire to take back my answer?"

"There is no hurry. I fancied it might suit you"—and Mr. Brockett looked at his watch, and rose from his chair,—“to know Mr. Yorke's mind; wherefore I ran across this evening. He can have no wish, in his present weak state, to press the matter to a conclusion, if you have none. Most likely he will ask what reception his proposal met with, when I see him to-morrow. Shall I tell him you will consider it?"

"What, sir?"—and Sir Hugh, stepping back, measured the man of law from head to feet,—when, checking himself, as he saw the injustice of being wrath with the agent for the act of his principal; "Mr. Brockett," he said, as calmly as his passion would allow him, "you know I am rather a peppery fellow on some points; I take it after my sires; it runs in the family; so you must be pleased to excuse

me, if I can't command myself quite as coolly as you can peel a pear, while you are proposing to a father—hard pressed, I grant, devilish hard!—to—to—to—” and the knight's voice faltered—“to sell his child, to pay his debts—for that's the long and short of it—to pay his debts, sir,—though, to save him from a gaol, it sent her to the grave. Hold that right hand out to me now, does he—for my daughter—but for which, I might go to the dogs? There then—” and Sir Hugh spat, as if on it—“that's my answer to him,” snapping his fingers; “take it to him, with Hugh Walcot's compliments—the bill defaulter—mind and say that—ha! ha! ha! got him now, have I?—wants my daughter—will give Three Hundred Thousand Pounds for her, and forgive me my trespasses?—ha! ha! ha!—no, no, Mr. Brockett—pardon me, I mean nothing personal—Hugh Walcot has enough in all conscience to answer for, without having the sale of his child, to save himself, laid to his charge. Hollo, sir! (to Rennie) what do you want? what do you mean by—”

"Tea is ready, Sir Hugh," apologized Rennie, who had kept behind the folding screen till his master ceased speaking. "My lady desired me to ask you if you would take coffee, first?"

"Confound the fellow!" muttered Sir Hugh to himself, "I wonder if he overheard me?" and turning to Mr. Brockett and grasping his arm, "You will take a cup, won't you, before you go?"

"Not to-night;" and if Jonathan Brockett knew how to smile, when he came in, he also knew how to smile, when he went away; till out of bounds and on the old turnpike road, (for which he paid as well as others), his jaw lengthened to those 'natural' dimensions, as Mrs. Brockett termed them, to which it elongated itself always when he was at home, and 'hung his fiddle up,' and let conscience have its holiday; and sniffing the fresh breeze of the heath, "What a life is ours!" he mentally exclaimed; "who would be a solicitor? Shew me another honest man in the world, though, who does so much dirty work as an attorney,

whether he will or not, and keeps his hands so clean? The egregious mistake of that pompous fool, sticking himself up in that way, and calling me 'sir,' and measuring me up and down as he did! and five more writs will be out against him, to my certain knowledge, before the week's over. A pretty sort of fellow to be spitting at people who come to help him. Humph! I should be devilish sorry to be in his shoes, I can tell him. Yorke will foreclose instant, that's clear, and I don't blame him. How else is he ever to get a shilling? There won't be a sixpence soon. Say the place is worth more than what it's mortgaged for, who'll advance him enough, to stop us, if he proceed by ejectment? Tender the principal and interest, and costs, can he, in six months? I know better. All the same—no there I can't blame him—hang me, if I'd marry my daughter to Joel Yorke—no, not if he could settle on her the wealth of the Indies! So help me heaven! I would follow her to the grave first. I will say—pompous fool as he is—he spoke like a man there. What the deuce they'll do

I don't know. They must smash, that's certain. Well, if men will be such fools, how's the world to do without lawyers, I should like to know? Arnold Grey would tell you a way in a moment. It won't be in my time, that's a comfort, or woe betide me! Stage coachmen can turn their hands to turning their wives' mangles, or anything of that sort; but throw an attorney at law out of employ, what, in heaven's name, would he be fit for?" With which grave reflection, arriving at his own door, the gas lamp over it burnt so bright, and shewed to all the world, if they liked to look, the large brass plate on which was engraved Mr. Brockett, Solicitor, in letters an inch long, shining so nicely, after the rubbing it had had that morning! that Jonathan Brockett's fears of Arnold Grey and his social reformations melted into so pleasant a dream, as he passed through his office on his way to his tea, at sight of the double rows of strong boxes round him, with titles enough in them to entitle him to feel not a little proud of himself, if so minded,—that when he entered the draw-

ing-room, Mrs. Brockett could not forbear a little exclamation of uneasiness, as pinching his ear, she asked him, "what mischief are you up to now, that you smile so?"

Lady Walcot made sure of seeing Mr. Brockett, before he left; and her heart sunk a little when Sir Hugh entered the boudoir, where she was sitting with Maud and Annie and Mr. Gracechurch—without him. Sir Hugh's face was flushed more than usual, even when he had drank double what he had indulged in that day, and Lady Walcot sat on thorns till Mr. Gracechurch took his leave. When, throwing himself full length on the sofa, as was his customary wont, when there was anything on his mind that he wanted to out with, without betraying how much it troubled him, she drew a lounge chair close to him; and taking up the *Morning Post*, asked him carelessly if he had read some *on dit* of fashionable life that was going the round of Belgravia, about the Amazonian qualities of the present race of young ladies of rank, *sans fortune*, and the disastrous number of young old maids there



were among the upper circles, in consequence?

That Sir Hugh would be taking any interest just then, any more than herself, in the Belles of Belgravia, or what became of them, and their suicidal hobbies, (not 'hubbies'—the two words being antipodes), never entered Lady Walcot's head that evening; but she was longing to hear what Mr. Brockett had been there for, without further suspense, and knowing her husband, hit on this as the most likely way to make him the more anxious to tell her, in proportion as she seemed in no hurry to be told, till it was quite agreeable to him.

"Shall I read it to you?" and Lady Walcot searched for the paragraph.

"No, no, never mind now. I want to speak to you of something else. Where are the girls?"

"Gone up-stairs with Miss Gwynn."

"Who'd have ever thought"—and Sir Hugh laughed—"she was worth all that money?"

"What, 'Coquette?'" for he had been talking of selling the chestnut filly for some time past, when he could get a good price for her.

"No, by George! I wish she was. You should have a diamond necklace, then, and pendants, to wear with your black velvet, would take the shine out of Penelope Stern's, I can tell you. Hark—you'll laugh, I know, and say I'm out of my wits, as you always do, but it's as true as that's a head on your shoulders—I can pay my debts, every sixpence, not owe a shilling in the world to-morrow."

"Hugh—Hugh—how can you be so!—"

"Hold hard! have patience—that's the mere first little rub of the Aladin Lamp. Yes, it's as true as you're Arabella Walcot—be out of debt, out of danger, before this day month, if I please; and marry Annie to a man worth Six Hundred Thousand Pounds, if he's worth a farthing; and—hold hard—who will settle Three Hundred Thousand on her, and say thank you, too, my Lady."

Lady Walcot sank back in her chair, crossed her arms over her bosom, and looking up, as if to heaven, sighed deeply.

"What do you think of that?" asked Sir Hugh, irritably turning, from his back, on one side, to see what effect his Aladin communication had had.

"The same as yourself, of course."

"Ah, ah! how do you know what I feel? How can you possibly tell? Don't I want money devilish bad? Three more writs since Monday, eh? Nice to walk the wide world free as a lark, wouldn't it be?"

"Very."

"It's not enough, you think, perhaps? Hold out a little, ha! ha! ha! as they did with the bill, eh? he might come down with another Hundred Thousand, or so? ha! ha!"—and glaring at her, as he lay on one elbow, with his left hand grasping her arm, Lady Walcot shuddered at the bewildered look he gave her, as springing to the floor, he paced to and fro with clenched fists, striking the air, as if out of his senses.

“My love, this is not facing the troubles like yourself—with your usual courage and firmness. Hugh—Hugh—what would you say to me, a poor, weak woman as I am, if I were to act so?”

“Men feel these things differently to women. How dare he insult me so? How dare he suppose that because I am in his debt, because he could turn me into the streets tomorrow, if he chose, I would sell my child, to save myself? The atrocious villany of that! the cowardly meanness of the fellow! the despicable selfishness of taking advantage of such an opportunity to affront and degrade me! the insufferable impudence! the audacious assurance! of his coming now, after irreparably injuring me as he has done, with that miserly, cold-blooded, treacherous right hand of his, to ‘make it up,’ as he calls it, at the expense of my honor!”—and Sir Hugh stopped short, with the froth on his lip,—“yes, and I have sent him his answer.”

“One that was worthy of yourself, I hope,” sighed Lady Walcot, with heaving bosom.

"Worthy or not, what do I want with hand of his? that would throw us all into the road to-morrow, and me into a gaol, if it were not for his jealous envy—envy of the happiness of others, that's it, which he'd give half his wealth to purchase, if he could; and never will, with a mercenary, black heart like his, as long as there's breath in his body! Spit at him? Yes, and snap my fingers in his face, if it took from me every stick I'd got in the world! Who called me a defaulter all over the town? That was true, was it? I can forget that, can I?"

"And was that what Mr. Brockett came for—to 'propose' for Annie?" asked Lady Walcot, drying the tears from her eyes.

"What's the good of shedding tears for a heartless rascal like that? Do you think he would shed a tear for you, if it would save your soul from perdition? Not he. Yes, that was what Brockett came for. And he has got his answer; and I hope he will give it him, word, for word as I sent it."

"What was it, my love? You surely did not—"

"That," said Sir Hugh, snapping his fingers, and spitting in the air. "Though, mind you, I don't blame Brockett. He only carried out his instructions; he's not a bad fellow by any means; I'm afraid I spoke rather sharp to him, though."

"My God!" ejaculated Lady Walcot, "what will become of us?"

Sir Hugh put his lips to her cold cheek, and kissed it fondly.

"The deuce of it is," he said, "I'll be hanged! if I know where to apply to—now he's restive."

"Who, Joel Yorke?"

"Yes. He won't come down with another shilling. And there are all those new shares to pay for?"

"You can return them, can't you?"

Sir Hugh groaned:—

"Isn't it always the way? Just as a prize *must* turn up—if you'd only the ready—the

devil a bit—it's enough to drive one raving mad!"

"If that were all, I shouldn't mind," and Lady Walcot wrung her hands. "The tradespeople are very pressing. If we could satisfy *them* in any way. Oh, Hugh, what will be the end of it?"

It was a difficult question to answer, especially at that time of night, and with a fagged spirit to bring to the encounter; and Sir Hugh sat down, with his hands grasping his thighs, fairly at fault.

A heart-breaking sigh broke from Lady Walcot's bosom. The power to talk any more seemed to have left her. Mental misery was in her face. Whatever else she kept from him, not to drive him to distraction, Sir Hugh saw *that*.

"Let us go and wish the girls good night," he said, "and then to bed, for I'm regularly knocked up. And to-morrow I'll ride over to Swivel, and hear what he can do. There's one comfort—if, anyhow, I could raise enough,

to bag those shares, as sure as fate, I should be worth £20,000, clear, by this day twelve-month—that would be a settler for them all, by Jove! wouldn't it?"

The girls had gone to bed. Miss Gwynn advised it, as Annie complained of head-ache. Lady Walcot easily conceiving the cause of which, merely took a loving-mother's peep in, to see they were both safe; and then lay her head on her own pillow, to seek what rest she could, with an aching heart; while Sir Hugh, of a more sanguine temperament, slept till morning, undisturbed. And when he woke, "he had had the most brilliant dreams!" he said "all about heaps of gold and silver. Only let him bag those Bacon and Cabbage shares, and before another year was over his head, see if Hugh Walcot would give the wall to Joel . Yorke, indeed!"



## CHAPTER VI.

BRINGS AUNT POYNTE TO LINCOURT RECTORY,  
AND SHEWS WHAT TWO GOSSIPS SHE AND  
PENELOPE STERN WERE.

"CLEARLY, my dear, Mr. Gracechurch is smitten with Annie Walcot. I told the Rector so more than a week ago. He don't deny it himself. He is such a simple, unsophisticated creature, that he turned quite pale the other day, when his mother was telling us of the tricks they play with the milk in May Fair; so much so, my dear, that when Gabriel was a baby, she had a donkey brought to the door in Curzon Street, every day for six months, while he was cutting his teeth, rather than any of

their sky-blue chalk mixture should enter his dear little lips. She says 'he was the sweetest tempered baby you ever saw in your life!' She don't remember his crying, what you may call really crying, 'more than once all the time he was being weaned, and that was once when the nurse let the scalding pap fall on his dear little toes; but directly his mother ran to him and took him on her lap, the smile he gave her, as he lay and looked up at her with his great open blue eyes, was so truly angel-like! that she made a vow from that moment he should be brought up to the church.' And, to shew you how guileless he is, only the other day, the pearl button came off his glove; and the pretty to-do there was between him and Miss Gwynn, the governess, at the Rookery, before he would hear of such a thing as troubling her to run in for the needle and thread to sew it on again, shewed what a heart he has got. It was beautiful! And so gentlemanly. You could see how he felt for her position. I liked *that* so much! His cheeks were all of a glow; I never saw anything more

charming. Lucky for him he is well off, or his liberality would cost him dear. His hand is always in his pocket, and truly you may say, his left don't know what his right does. A little pains him, though, deeply! as a little will give him pleasure. You would hardly believe it, but he comes to me sometimes with almost tears in his eyes, when any of the school children misbehave themselves, it wounds him so! On Sunday last he was quite affected, at seeing two of the girls, while he was preaching in the afternoon, making faces at each other behind the organ. He's a most excellent creature! and Annie may consider herself very fortunate, my dear; though whether anything will ever come of it, now they are in such sad trouble there,—” and Mrs. Stern shook her head ominously, as she lashed ‘Snowball’ on a little faster with the whip, after their ascent of the hill out of Rexford, to which picturesque old city she had driven over that morning, to tell Aunt Poynts, of the Priory, all about Joel Yorke’s illness; and to fetch her for a few days visit at the Rectory, before going to the Hall—“is more

than I should like to take upon myself to say. Their affairs are in a pitiable plight, I hear."

The question is, did aunt Eleanor Poynts know, or did she not, that her niece Mabel Yorke secretly sighed at the thought of what trouble Clement Walcot was in, let alone all the rest of his house, oftener than she deemed it indispensable to tell to even dear auntie herself? If she did know it, the look of grief and concern with which she sat and listened, without uttering a word in reply to Mrs. Stern's long speech up the hill, may be easily accounted for; and if not, she might have had very good reasons just then for rather preferring to listen than to talk, especially on subjects with which Penelope Stern was so much better acquainted than herself, and seemed that pleasant morning to be more than usually communicative upon.

"It's frightful, they say, my dear,"—Mrs. Stern used the endearing 'my dear' to most of her 'bosom friends,'—"really frightful! the grievous condition Sir Hugh has brought them all into, by his mad schemes of one sort or an-

other, for he *must* be mad to go on as he does. None but a madman would hurl away the money as he hurls it. When I say hurls, muddles is a better word, for how it all goes, nobody can conceive. Go it does, somehow, for I'm told they haven't a shilling at the bank, and the tradespeople won't give them any more credit. Arabella's looking like a ghost; and the girls, poor dears! my heart bleeds for them, brought up as they have been with every luxury. How are *they* fitted to turn out in the world, if not married—and who'll have penniless ladies, for wives, now a days? Isn't it dreadful?" and struck with the horror of her own picture, Snowball got another cut or two, as if *he* could help it; while aunt Poynts 'oh'd?' and 'ah'd?' and 'indeed'd?' with little more dread of consequences, seemingly, than if she had had mints of money, and was then trotting across, to make them all as independent of the butcher, baker, grocer, coal merchant, &c., &c., at The Rookery, poor dunned, done-up, doomed, dismal souls! as she was herself, better luck for her!

"I feel for Annie more than I can express," went on Mrs. Stern; "just now, too, when there was such an excellent chance of her doing so well—it's quite heart-breaking!"

"If Mr. Gracechurch admires her as much as you say," observed aunt Poynts, "and he is so well off, money won't be an object."

"That's true, dear; but it's not pleasant to come in, is it, just in time to prop up a falling house? I mean, however generous he may be, Annie must feel it—feel it keenly? I know I should, if I were in her place."

"You think she likes him, then?"

"Certainly. And they seem very well suited for each other. I can see no objection but *one*."

"The falling house?" rejoined aunt Poynts, "which even the rats desert? Well, one must have regard for oneself, undoubtedly, in this doubtful world. Friends can't be expected to endanger themselves, can they, unnecessarily, any more than the rats? There is one thing to be said for the falling ones, they have only to set

to work and build themselves a better house, and no fear of friends enough, and rats, too, coming back to them, when they have rebuilt, and fitted it up, and furnished it comfortably? And Clement, what is he doing?"

"You may well ask!" and though stepping out his best, poor Snowball got two such sharp cuts, simultaneously with the sudden tight jerk of his under jaw, for no earthly reason that aunt Poynts could see, that she drew in her breath, and winced! as if the whip had personally affronted herself; which wince Penelope Stern attributing to her tacit acknowledgment of the stubborn nature of the animal, he got two cuts more, and one over, "just to shew him who was behind him, and that if his master didn't know how to drive him, his mistress did, and so she'd shew him, if he came any of his lazy tricks over her."

"Almost time he settled to something," admitted aunt Poynts.

"Make a poet think that, my dear, if you can."

"Example goes a great way? His father's

was not the best, for an impulsive fellow like he is. I must acknowledge to a little sly leaning towards poor Clement, spite of his heroic failings."

"He has abilities in plenty, if he would use them to a good purpose."

"Necessity developes wonders—let us hope that he will."

"True. If he don't, he will smart for it!" and the whipcord vividly illustrating the idea on Snowball's flank, again aunt Poynts screwed in her lips! with an inward vow, "That the first time she got hold of Master Clement, she would read him such a lecture as would either reform him *in toto*, or wipe him out of her good books entirely—which she had a slight notion would go near to break Mabel's heart, and then what would become of him?"

"I met him yesterday," pursued Penelope, "nearly opposite Yorke House, and you never saw such a wild, hair-brained, harum-scarum figure as he was!"

"Oh, near Yorke House? And what did he say for himself?"



“Trust him for letting me get within speech of him, if he can help it,” laughed Mrs. Stern, playfully ‘touching up’ Snowball, lest he should get sleepy going down hill. “No, no, my young gentleman, in the old shooting jacket and—you should have seen his hat, not worth picking up by a beggar—was off like a shot. What do you think he told somebody once, just under the quickset, where he as little thought I was, on the other side, as of flying?” and Penelope burst out laughing at the fun of it,—‘that he would as soon come across the ‘old gentleman’ himself, as that awful Penelope Stern, and her long lectures.’ I owe him one for it, don’t I?”

Aunt Poynts could command herself, under any ordinary aggravations, whether to laugh or to cry; and merely smiling, agreed that “He was a strange creature; and how lucky he ought to think himself, not to have had the watering pot emptied on him, bucket and all, for his impudence! And,” went on Auntie, by way of changing the theme, out of regard to Snowball, as Penelope’s jaw deepened again,

"Mr. Gracechurch is looking sweet on Annie, is he? And Annie has no glimmerings left, then, of the old flame!"

"For Joel Yorke? None, not a spark! How is it possible? It makes one—"

"Shudder, to think of it? Well, I must own it's as well as it is; though I believe Joel loved her. In fact, between ourselves, my belief is, she and his mother are the only two persons, living or dead, he ever really loved in his life."

"Except," demurred Penelope, with a curl of the lip.—

"Himself? Ah, that's so universal a malady, that we must not be too strict? And pray, talking of looking sweet, has no one any fond eyes yet for Mary Grey? I can't conceive what the young fellows are thinking of!"

"Very likely of what an oddity she is—never two hours alike, as capricious as the weather-cock, as changeable as an April day. That don't suit everyone, does it? And it's a great pity, for she's a nice girl, and good looking, decidedly good looking, and clever, and, they say, very much beloved by the poor."

"No bad name to have, that? I hear she has been very kind to the Bonds, since Betsy has been in prison. How glad we were to hear of her acquital. She is with her mother now, in the cottage the Andrew's used to live in, in Holly Lane?"

"I believe so," and round went the lash, this time, with such a determination to convince Snowball, "that his master was not behind him, if he had got any such erroneous notion into his head, but Penelope Stern, and no one but Penelope," that poor Auntie literally squeaked out! which unhappily producing the very reverse effect to what she intended, off tore Snowball at full speed along the inclined plane, for nearly a mile and a half, that led to the only way he saw of getting any peace and comfort in the world; which requiring both of Penelope's hands, to check his too eager aspirations thereunto, Aunt Poynts kindly took present charge of the whip—asrag-a-muffin an old affair as ever Rector, with a living of £900 a-year, and eight acres of glebe land, *unostentatively* drove about with, to the

astonishment of everybody; and lo and behold! when Snowball came to the hill foot, up which he had to climb before he caught sight of his own chimney pots—there was a pretty job! the whip was gone! Auntie must have dropped it out on her side, either by accident or design. And now, well might Snowball cock his ears, and “hope and trust, when Auntie bought them a new one,”—at least so Auntie would have thought, if she had been Snowball,—“when she bought them a new one, she would exercise that tender mercy, touching the weight of the thong, so highly recommended by that profound philosopher, who, in his quality of law-maker, required, that before the infliction of any extraordinary torture, the ingenious inventor of it should first have a liberal trial made of it on his own person, by able hands; and if he approved of it, then, and not till then, it should come into common use and practice, and be hailed as a public boon.”

“And so Mary Grey’s ‘duplex little nature,’ as her father calls it,” continued Aunt Poynts, as soon as Penelope had determined not to

turn back for the lost whip, but to hope and trust that some one, who knew whose it was—as there were not two like it in the world—would bring it to its rightful owner, “keep all the beaus off, does it?”

“Roland Yorke seems the only one of them who gets on at all with her; but then he is such an oddity himself.”

“Oh, and *they* agree pretty well, do they? He has not broken his heart, then, at Annie’s desertion?”

“Annie’s? My dear, she is one of *us*—thoroughly ‘high-church,’ my dear;” and checking herself, at the recollection that Aunt Poynts’ own side of the question, if she would speak candidly, had yet to be determined; “What I mean, my dear, is, that it is so essential, don’t you think so, to the happiness of young people now-a-days, that, on religious points especially, there should be no difference of opinion between them, if they are to be man and wife?”

“Now-a-days,” thought Aunt Poynts to herself, “that’s funny! Why more *now*, than

in our father's and mother's time, when there were neither 'highs' nor 'lows,' so to speak, that I remember;" but, refraining herself, "The more they agree together, as man and wife should, the better for them no doubt," she assented; "though, with regard to the distinctive titles we give ourselves, where find any warrant for them in Christ's teaching?"

"My dear, urgent symptoms call for unusual efforts, to deal with them. We must make use of the best means we have got. The lamentable necessities of the present times, spiritually speaking, demand extraordinary exertions on the part of zealous friends to the Church's welfare, never more in danger than now. The age is alarmingly selfish and sensual, my dear. The Rector predicts for it, ere long, the fate of imperial Rome. I assure you, my dear, the struggles that the 'high-church' are making, in the cause, is the only way to cope with the terrible luke-warmness, and disaffection, and indifference of those, whose indolence is at the root of the scandalous

schisms that tear us asunder. We would bring all under one Church, if we could."

"Do you go quite the right way about it?" ventured Aunt Poynts. "Though much inclined towards you, in some things, I must say I don't think you do. The question is, in what does so much difference of opinion as there is among us, really originate? Again, is all done, that *is* done, to the honor and glory of God alone? If so, how senseless, how sinful! to be quarrelling with each other about fringes."

"Fringes! Time some one quarrelled, my dear, with the state of things that the Bishops were blind to, when, I can remember very well, only one sermon was preached at Lyncourt on Sundays, and the Church never publicly open for Divine Service but once a week. It was not falling out with 'fringes' alone, was it, to petition the Bishop's attention to that? Please to come and see us now, and think of what Lyncourt Church was then. And have we no right to be proud?"

"Ah, there's the danger. Yes, undoubtedly,

of what you have done, and are doing to *His* honor and glory. I, humbly, take that to be the only true test of the intrinsic worth of it all; anything beyond which, is vanity and vain glory, and does more harm than good. Over zeal goes to extremes. The 'high-church' party have done *too much*, perhaps, as well as the 'low-church' party too little."

"How so, pray?"

"At all events, you grant it is a terribly luxurious and licentious age we live in? And so it is. By all accounts, crimes of the higher kind are on the increase. It is shocking to read in the newspapers, how wicked we are, with all the new churches, and the money spent on them—with all the increased means industriously provided us to be God-fearing and good. There must be some radical fault somewhere. God has many more Houses built for Him now, than He had when you and I were girls. The question is, are we more Heavenward, for them, as a people, than we were? are we less wilful and wicked? do we, in truth, honor and love and worship and glo-



rify Him more, and ourselves less? As far as externals go, there seems every promise. We certainly ought to be better, if we are not. Great pains are taken for us. What money, and energy, and art, and science, and good taste, and first-class abilities, can do for us, is done with unsparing hand. Why, then, are we so wicked? No efforts are left untried to attract. The senses have no right to complain. Everywhere a welcoming voice says, 'come in here.' There is excellent accommodation now for all. What more can we want? Why, then, are we so wicked? why will we not be good?"

"Because we are slow to see our blindness, which prefers not to be enlightened by any way but its own; and will cling to bygone customs, however erroneous and insufficient they may be. Look at some of the old pews at Millford—what obstinate folly to suffer them to stand any longer. Sweep them away, and see the nice open space it would give for free seats.

"Well, there I don't quite agree with you.

Dispositions differ, and must be cared for, in things spiritual, as well as bodily. It is only the opinion of an old fashioned old woman, I know, but as far as I am personally concerned, I shall not easily give up my old pew. If I feel pleased with it, and it with me, why part us? If I feel that it helps my devotions, why turn me out into a staring seat, open at both ends, with all eyes on me, to keep *me* in order? and when a popular preacher crams eight people into six seats, and crushes the silks and satins all to pieces, to keep my thoughts, too, anywhere but where they ought to be, and where they would have been, but for those meddling, modern, never-at-rest improvers. You may smile, but I shall stick to my old pew as long as I can; wherein I feel that I can fall on my knees when I like, and incommode no one, just the same as if I were in my closet, and free to fall down and open my heart as He bade us do, when we wanted Him to see and Hear us, and no one else."

"True, my dear. But all who go to church are not like Eleanor Poynts. And open seats,

if they crush the crinolines rather, preserve order and decorum, and that reverent observance of prescribed forms so lamentably undervalued, you will allow, under the old system, where not only were you shut in by oak walls, but must have curtains, too, drawn round you, to help your devotions; forgetting my dear, how much good is done by example, and how many are brought to conviction, because, like sheep, they follow their leaders? Arnold Grey may talk, my dear, of 'lofty extremes,' as he calls them; but it's only within the last twelve months he has had a regular curate, and look at the population of Millford, almost as large as Lyncourt."

"Did all the work himself? That was labour indeed, earning his pay hard!"

"Yes, and you should see the surplice he wears, it's really scandalous! you never saw such a washed-out old rag as it is. I forget now how many iron-mould spots Mary Grey counted in it herself, one Sunday, when he was at the Altar, and the sun shone on it. I believe he glories in it! and do you call that

decent and proper? Then, again, see the encouragement he gives to such incorrigible reprobates as that Ralph Andrews—going to get him a place when he comes out of gaol; yes, and that wicked, worthless hussy, Betsy Bond, that the Rector turned out of Lyncourt—Mary Grey is doing as much for her, as if she had never given her mother an hour's uneasiness. I ask is that fair and just towards the good girls?"

"The Vicar thinks, perhaps, that the sick need a physician more than the sound; that the lost sheep must be sought, at any risk to those in the fold. He has 'scripture warrant for it,' he says—'I came to save that which is lost.'"

"I wish him joy of his 'refuge for the destitute,' which Millford will soon be, if he don't mind. I have no patience with it! Now whenever we find it necessary to make an example in the parish, and put a black mark on any of them, 'Oh, brand us, will they?' they cry. 'Go to Millford and see if the Vicar would do it—not he.'"

"It will be labour in vain, then, you think, with Ralph Andrews and Betsy Bond?"

Penelope Stern smiled.

"The Vicar seems very sanguine about them?"

Still, Penelope was amused at the idea.

"Hopes to make them decent members of society, I hear."

Penelope laughed out loud:—

"They say he's writing a work now,—it was to have been a pamphlet only, but has swelled into two thick octavo volumes already, and it's not half done,—a work, dear, to be dedicated to the Home Secretary, in which he lays down a serious scheme for what do you think?—The doing away with gaols, abolishing capital punishments, and making what he calls 'God's Law, Rightly Taught And Administered, The Only Means For Regenerating Mankind.' What do you think of that?"

"I shade my eyes when I look at the sun; it is too dazzling for weak eyes like mine," replied Aunt Poynts, clasping her hands in her lap, "though I cannot even glance at

its blinding brightness, it is beautiful, very beautiful! that every instinct of my nature tells me; though I turn my back on it, it warms me, strengthens me, gladdens me, I love it so! and feel it does me so much good, I could almost fall down and worship it!"

"Dear me! I declare here comes Sir Hugh, galloping away, as usual;" and the next minute clearing the hedge that divided them from the heath side:

"Ah! ah!" cried the Knight, flourishing his whip-stick, "caught you both, have I, saying handsome things of me, in my absence? Well, and what's the best news you've got to tell me? for I don't want any groans and grumbles; enough of those at home, eh, without coming out for them?"

"You look so gay and smiling," laughed Aunt Poynts, "you must have something good to tell us, I should think?"

"If I whisper it in your ear, it's *entre nous*, mind?"

"As if you need say that," laughed Mrs. Stern. "What do you take us for?"

"Penelope Stern and Eleanor Poynts—that's enough, isn't it?"

"Let me catch Eleanor gossiping, that's all."

"Let me catch Penelope."

"Hark ye, then—what will you give me, if I tell you?"

"All it's worth, and a penny over."

"Done! Do you know what you're in for, Miss Poynts? As sure as you're sitting there, Twenty Thousand Pounds, clear, before this day twelvemonth!"—and Daredevil cocking his ears at it, off they galloped, leaving poor Auntie to what solace gossip Penelope could find it in her heart to afford her, till they reached the Rectory.

## CHAPTER VII.

TELLS OF JOEL YORKE'S DETERMINATION TO  
MAKE HIS WILL, AND HOW, IN DEFIANCE OF  
HIM, MABEL CORRESPONDED WITH 'THE  
GHOST IN THE BATTERED HAT.'

AUNT POYNTS' arrival at Lyncourt soon got wind; and reaching Nelly in due course, Nanny knew all about it, as well as other matters brought in that afternoon by Bob Acorn, the page, before tea time; and Miss Mabel clapped her hands, with the tears in her eyes, to think she should be sure to see dear Auntie next day, and have some one to whom



she could freely open her mind, to keep her company for an hour or two.

And well Mabel might feel dull and wretched ; for, after his interview that morning with Joel, Mr. Brockett had told her of his visit to Sir Hugh the evening before, and what was the result of it. The certainty that Joel would now proceed, by ejection, required to be looked fearlessly in the face, all hope of melting his heart by reasoning or entreaty being, Brockett said, "mere waste of words. He had said all he could to induce him to think better of it, and not aggravate his present sufferings of mind and body by an act, which, when he had done it, he would never forgive himself for ; but he was colder than iron, and harder than a flint, you might as well talk to the winds." Of course he had said nothing to Mr. Yorke of Sir Hugh's insulting reply to his proposals ; but Joel Yorke was not a man to be hood-winked, or put off with half answers ; and, in short, had elicited enough from him, to know that his offers were peremptorily rejected, be the consequences what they might,

either to Sir Hugh, himself, or any member of his family.

“And it was a terrible blow to him! I suppose?” said Mabel, looking, as if almost paralyzed by it herself, into the grave face of the lawyer, for the only chance of help within reach.

“The black cloud that came over his face was terrific!” replied Brockett.

“What did he say?”

“Nothing till I rose to leave him; and then only a muttered word or two, to the effect ‘that he would let me know what to do to-morrow, and if I wouldn’t act for him, somebody else should,’ that was all.”

“What is to be done?”

“He will proceed to extremities, that’s certain. It is useless blinking at it. As well try to turn the tides, as alter him now. It must be met somehow. Either the principal and interest, and costs, must be paid, or out they must go, there’s no help for it.”

Mabel wrung her hands. “How foolish! how wrong of Roland! not to have taken the

money he was entitled to when he might have had it. See the good he could have done with it now! Isn't it distracting, to think of it? Would Four Thousand Pounds be of any use, do you think?"

"For what?"

"To settle it, in any way—to save them from being turned out, I mean?"

"It might stay proceedings, so far; but what would be the good of it, involved as they are? Double five would not clear them. And then, where's the income to keep up a place like that! He can't keep it up, struggle ever so."

"If my brother were satisfied, it might give them time, I thought."

"How so? There he is off on Daredevil again to-day, galloping after those bubble shares, just as if he didn't owe a shilling in the world. How much do you suppose—if he had five thousand pounds in hand to-morrow, would be left of it in six weeks, now that cunning fellow Jenkins has got hold of him again? Not a farthing. It might effect a composition

perhaps, and that's the only good I see it could do. But he won't listen to it. Though a fool, he is no knave, not a bit of it. Drayton says, he told him this morning, 'he was as sure of Twenty Thousand, clear, by this day twelvemonth, as that he had a head on his shoulders.' What's to be done for a man, who raves in that manner? Besides which, look at what he is in for to Swivel. I always thought he would ruin him. And so he has. Oliver Swivel's a consummate—I know what. No—if you have four thousand you can't find a better use for than making ducks and drakes of it, I think I can put you in a way to lay it out for them—if you must—with far more wisdom than that. Roland had some conversation with me about it yesterday. I quite agree with him—'stopping gaps don't make a firm fence.' Wait a little, and may be you will find somebody, before long, you would like to give it to better than Messrs. Bubbles and Co."

Mabel's cheeks burned.

"Oh, a million pardons! no offence I hope?

You will forgive the presumption of an old friend, but there's nothing to blush at, I assure you. He's a capital fellow as lives, when you get him to talk mother tongue; and he *can*, too, if he likes, as well as anyone. Good bye—wish you every luck. Let's see, how much was it Roland was speaking of?—five and four, wasn't it?—that makes just nine, don't it?—of course it does—good bye—a nice little sum, eh, to put on the parchment, before taking the leap—*respice finem*—ask Roland the meaning of it, if you don't know—it means, have all you can settled on yourself and children, before marrying any man, especially a poet—God bless you!”

“Won't I pay Roland out for that, when I see him?” smiled Mabel to herself. “Heigho! what a time to get through till eleven to-morrow;” and thinking a moment, “I wonder if I can find a decent pen and ink anywhere? In case of accidents, it's as well to be prepared at all points. That's what he means by *respice finem*, I daresay. Probably, he won't stay an instant longer than just to pull the

bell, and put the parcel in my hand, and be off, in his usual distracted way, when he can't have what he wants. I will go and ask Nelly. It's just possible she knows there *is* such a thing in the world as a pen ; and if not, it's time she did, at her age ; and what ink is, too, and a sheet of note-paper of some sort, and a bit of wax, if only as big as her thimble. Of course he will expect a line or two, to say thank you, for taking so much trouble for me. If I send Nelly out for half a quire, I can make as many rough copies as I like, and so get through the evening beautifully ! Heigho ! I know what I wouldn't do for all the wealth of the world—pass my days in Yorke House. What a life ! what a scarecrow I should be in a month ! I feel my eyes and cheeks getting quite hollow already. I hardly knew myself this morning, when I looked in the glass. No wonder Joel's such a skeleton. I wonder whether Nanny would mind my writing in the kitchen ?—it's so dull here ! I'll send Nelly out for a little rum, or something of that

sort, for them, and then they can make themselves a glass each of what they like best, and we shall be as cozy and sociable as possible. But, first, I'll just run up and see how Joel is. And then, if Roland come in again, see if I don't trounce him well for his audacity! Just as if a great girl of my age isn't to be trusted with her own money, to do as she likes with it! Heigho! I wish it was half-past ten o'clock to morrow morning—what an awful time to get through!"

Joel was asleep, seemingly; and Nanny and Nelly were in close confab together by the bed-side, when Mabel, gently opening the door, put her head into the room to take a precautionary peep, before venturing further. Whereupon, Nanny raised her finger to her lips, as turning on his side, facing them, she made sure it was only to change the position, "when Mr. Yorke would fall off again, and, as he had had his tea, continue to sleep very likely for some hours." But, in this, Nanny was mistaken; for, observing his sister, Mr. Yorke lifted himself up on one elbow, and, star-

ingsavagely at his two servants, motioned them to be gone; and then pointing to the chair by the bed-foot, seemed calmer, when Mabel drew it nearer him, and sat down on it, and he had her close to him, to speak to, if he wanted; which, be the mood what it might that he was in, was always what Joel liked to have beside him when he was ill, or troubled about anything—some one, within reach, to turn and talk to in a moment, when it pleased him.

Evidently, he was suffering acutely from the stunning blow to his pride and passion dealt him that morning by Sir Hugh's contemptuous rejection of his munificent offer for the hand of his daughter Annie, which had laid prostrate the only hope of happiness that, he used to tell his mother "his wealth could ever purchase him." Where was it now? Gone for ever. And though the heaps of gold in his strong boxes were too heavy to lift—O that dismal voice, that kept dinning in his ears—shut them against it as he would, "Joel Yorke! Joel Yorke! there is one thing that gold will *not* buy!—when would it cease to haunt? to



mock? to madden him? Oh! would he were the poorest pauper on earth, to know one hour's such happiness as was once the day and night dream of his soul; but now, though he could turn into gold, as they said he could, everything that he touched, seemed to be within the reach of everyone but himself, a paradise from which he alone was excluded, and which no offerings on his part, if he would exchange for it every farthing he possessed in the world, could gain him admission into—what a thought was that!—how could the spirit of man, though treble steeled with selfishness, thrice hardened, harder than adamant itself, stand against it?—‘Joel Yorke! Joel Yorke! there is one thing that gold will *not* buy!’ and it was dolefully ringing in his ears, when Mabel entered the room; just before which, as he lay with his back towards them as though he were asleep, Nanny and Nelly had been talking together of what Bob Acorn had told some one, that Mr. Rennie, the butler, at the Rookery, overheard Sir Hugh say to Mr. Brockett in the dining room, about

‘spitting at Mr. Yorke, and his offer for Miss Annie;’ and this it was that overspread his face with so deadly a hue, as Mabel drew her chair near enough to take his hand in hers, that, but that he breathed, and his eyes had some sparks of life yet left in them, she could have fancied it was a corpse she was sitting by, he looked so death-like.

And for several minutes Joel lay, as if unconscious of his sister’s presence, so utterly lost did he seem to everything but what his secret thoughts were brooding on; when suddenly staring at her, as though struck by some new idea:—

“I haven’t made my will yet,” he said, grasping up the bed-clothes with both hands, and holding in his under lip with his teeth.

“Why think of it now?” returned Mabel. “How foolish it is! You should only think of what will make you well again; and then there will be time, and plenty, to do it any day.”

“Any day!” and there was intense agony

of mind in his face, as he said it. "So little consequence to anyone as that, is it?"

"It is of far more consequence," replied Mabel firmly, "that you should make haste and get up again, and come down and keep me company, than lie troubling your head about what you needn't, and what can stand over very well till you are able to attend to it. You know what the doctor said?"

"You don't care whether I make my will or not? it's nothing to you?" muttered Joel, pursuing the thought uppermost.

"Why should it be anything to me just now? It is everything to me, to see you stronger and better, and down and about again—isn't that of most consequence?"

"Do you mean to say, you don't care if I died to-morrow, and left you nothing?"

"I mean to say, now is not the right time, when you are so ill and weak, to talk about that; and it is very unwise and very unkind of you too to do it."

Joel turned ghastly white, as laying his cold hand on his sister's wrist, he clutched it

tight, while seemingly struggling to find words for what he wanted to say to her.

"I wish," entreated Mabel, soothingly, "you would promise me to think only of—"

"Pshaw! pshaw!"—and he tightened his grasp of her wrist." "Answer me this—eh? eh? you love Clement Walcot, don't you?"

Mabel's cheeks sufficiently answered the question.

"And you tell *me* not to think of—her—not to think of—of being spat—spat`on—yes," and his long thin wiry fingers held her as if in a vice,—“spat on—for offering to cancel the deed, and settle Three Hundred Thousand Pounds on her, if she'd have me—not think of it, eh?—hark you!"

"I will not—I will leave you—I will go away, Joel, if you persist in exciting yourself in this way; as sure as you are lying there, it will bring on another fit; what will Mr. Potts say? I won't stay with you, if you frighten me so; it is so cruel of you; see how you have hurt my wrist, giving way to your passion; and what good can it do? it will

only throw you back again, and make your sufferings ten times greater. You know, as well as I do, how hasty and intemperate Sir Hugh is, the wrong things he does when he is in a rage,—who told you he said that?”

“My ears—I am not deaf—they shouldn’t talk so loud, if they don’t want me to know. And now—hark you—you don’t mind whether I make my will or not?—very well—stay—I haven’t done,” and the stifled vengeance with which he seemed to gloat over the words as they fell from his lips, was more terrifying to Mabel than his most violent outbursts,—“it’s the last I shall speak about it—as well you should know—I shall see Brockett again to-morrow—will you, or won’t you?”

“What?”

“Pshaw! You told me not to think of *her*, didn’t you?”

“I asked you not to think needlessly of what distressed you so much.”

“Eh, eh—yes—very well—and now I ask *you* not to think of *him*—do you understand?—the son of the man who spits at me—spits

at me, when I offer to pay his debts, and settle Three Hundred Thousand Pounds on his daughter, if she'll have me—speak—will you think of him, or won't you?"

"If I will—how then, Joel?"

"Then I shall ask Roland to try and induce you to think better of it, before it's too late; to persuade you, if he can, not to make such a fool of yourself."

"Oh! And supposing Roland should say it is no business of his, and decline to interfere."

"Then I must endeavour to shew him good reasons for coming to another conclusion."

"And failing these—you would cut us both off, you mean?"

"You know what I mean; and you know what I say, I will do."

"As far as Roland was concerned, my heart would bitterly, weep indeed, if you were to do anything so unjust, so wicked, Joel,"—and Mabel's voice trembled,—“as what you are now talking of, in vexation of spirit more than from any other feeling; for myself, come the

worst, I have enough, thanks to our dear mother, to live on, like a gentlewoman, with prudence; and what more I might want, I daresay I could do without, if I couldn't get it anyhow honestly. Nor will Roland have much to complain of, when you can make good to him what, if our poor dear father had lived a little longer, you know he meant to leave him in his will, and which you hold in trust for him, I believe, till he wants it—I mean, what he may call his rights—what you wrote and told him, when he was at Oxford, he was to consider his, whenever he chose to draw it. But we won't talk of such things any more now. See how they affect you—Joel—Joel—my dear brother—speak—speak to me, Joel,—”and bending over him, Mabel kissed his hollow cheek again and again; but he answered nothing, nor moved, while she wiped the cold drops from his forehead, as he lay back as seemingly inanimate as if he would never raise his eyes or hands again on earth, to do good or bad deed, so past all feeling was he.

The evening drew in; and Joel lay appa-

rently unconscious of what was being done for him. The doctor came, and went, and came again; but if he knew he was there, he shewed no sign of it. It was indeed a dismal sick room, and but that Roland and the Vicar came and sat with her for a while, Mabel would have found it very gloomy. The Vicar was in hopes of a bedside talk with Joel, after his own fashion; but his faculties, if they had not deserted him, seemed wrapped in so deep a stupor, that the necessary food and medicines, had to be put into his mouth with a tea-spoon; and it was a grave question with the doctor, "what another twenty-four hours might produce—whether, after the sleep the opiates would give him, he would rally again, and rise from it refreshed, or fall into a comatose state, till he was totally paralysed, or taken off by sheer exhaustion."

One little word of comfort Roland had to whisper, in Mabel's ear, before they wished good night, and he lingered behind the Vicar a moment, to be sure nobody heard it but herself:—"Mind, the Ghost in the Battered Hat



will be at the door at eleven o'clock to an instant; so, if you want to see a live ghost, you must look out!"

Twelve struck; and Mabel, with the 'rough drafts' round her on the kitchen table, was finishing the fair copy; when waking up from her doze over the fender—not to be unsociable—Nelly made bold to ask "what time it was?" Mabel had been too much engaged with the thoughts of the Ghost in the Battered Hat, to think of anything else; but "the noise, and racket, and rumpus that those oudacious rats made in the back parlor," admonishing Nelly, that it was high time they were all at rest—Mabel took a farewell peep at her sick brother; and then laying her head on her pillow, as soon as Nanny came up from her barrings and boltings, to her great easy chair again at the bed-head for the night, forgot all her troubles, past, present, and to come, directly she had said her prayers and closed her eyes, in that best of all comforters, a good sleep.

## CHAPTER VIII.

‘NECESSITY HAS NO LAW.’

AND now, after his little wager with Aunt Poynts, what luck awaited Sir Hugh Walcot, in Water Street, REXFORD, at the hands of Mr. Oliver Swivel?

“Ah, Mr. Mumbles, how do you do to-day? Always know where to find Mansfield Mumbles—at his post? England expects every man to do his duty, eh, Mumbles? Mr. Swivel’s within, I hope?”

Usually the ‘seedy old clerk’ smiled his best, when Sir Hugh’s jovial face, in the office, drew him from his stool, to shew the gallant

Knight into the presence of his principal ; for, notwithstanding he was very seedy and snuffy, and, apparently, by no means of a jocose turn, Sir Hugh invariably greeted him well ; and Mansfield Mumble's mother was a gentlewoman ; and Mansfield took after her in many things, especially in his sensitive appreciation of any due regard shewn for his blood ; and, in short, though times had not gone as well with him as they ought, Mansfield Mumbles *felt* those little attentions keenly ; and Sir Hugh lost nothing by them, as, on more than one occasion, he had been smuggled into the great Oliver's presence, through a side door, within five minutes of his arrival, when Messrs. This, That, and The other had been kicking their heels in an outer room for an hour almost, and nothing but the Supplement of *The Times* between them, to keep them quiet.

What, then, had happened to throw such an altered gloom over the old man's face, as, barely returning Sir Hugh's hearty greeting with common courtesy, he kept fidgetting with the pen in his hand,—his eyes now on it,

then on the floor, and then on it again, but never looking the Knight in the face,—so long without returning a direct answer to, ‘Mr. Swivel is within, I hope?’ that Sir Hugh got impatient, and was evidently meditating as to the necessity of cutting the matter short, by taking leave to go and look for himself, whether he was visible or not, when Mr. Mumbles “recollected that Mr. Swivel was not within, that he had gone to Yoxminster, to see Mr. Brockett, he believed, but that he had left a note for Sir Hugh, in case he called;” the which producing from a pocket in his desk, the gallant Knight’s eyes flashed indignantly, as he tore it open, at “the rather different treatment this was, to when his visits in Water Street were hailed with open arms, and the signal of his approach filled their hearts with gladness!”

“The world all over,” muttered Sir Hugh, as he ran his eye down the note—“*tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis*,” and making a stiff bow to Mr. Mumbles, whose old parchment-visage reddened with shame as he shuf-

fingly opened the door into the street, possibly at the conviction of what an old sneak he was, to thus suddenly behave towards a man whose , ' Ah, how do you do, Mumbles?'—if the Knight had been well off—the old ' slave of circumstances ' would have stood at the top of High Street on the coldest day of the year till his teeth chattered, rather than people passing shouldn't have heard it :—Daredevil had to leave his luncheon half eaten, Sir Hugh was so impatient to get home again.

Mr. Swivel must have taken the cross road to Yoxminster, though two miles round, or Sir Hugh would have met him. His note said nothing, and yet said a great deal. It made no apology for his being obliged to postpone their interview to a future day. " Urgent business called him to Yoxminster. He was very sorry to have heard from Mr. Brockett that Mr. Yorke positively refused any further advance, especially as he saw no other way of raising the money, and there were some bills that *must* be met when due. Perhaps Sir Hugh might think of some other

source from which to get the needful? If so, the sooner he succeeded the better. In which case, Mr. Swivel would be very glad to see or hear from him *as early as possible*. If anything fresh turned up, after he had seen Mr. Brockett again, he would let him know without delay."

When creditors become clamorous, there is no peace. Lady Walcot had found it to be so before now. But never till that morning had she any conception how insufferably rude, and selfish, and unfeeling, and insulting the fear of loss could make them, when set on, one after the other, to fight their own battles at all hazards. For four hours she had faced the storm, as meekly as might be; when there seeming no end to it, her perturbed brow at once determined Mr. Rennie to close the levee for the present; and "My Lady, feeling poorly, had gone up-stairs, to lie down," he told Sir Hugh. Mr. Clement Walcot was—Rennie "could not tell where exactly—out fishing he thought; Miss Annie had gone an airing with Lady Gracechurch and Miss Grey;

and Miss Maud and the governess were somewhere about the grounds."

Sir Hugh went into the drawing-room, and looked round him. It was therein that his Lady had been holding her 'receptions,' during his absence, and the room bore ample evidences that the company must have been of rather a 'mixed description.' The chairs stood in anything but 'graceful disorder;' and, here and there, some of the visitors, eager for the presence, had evidently overlooked the hall-mat, and forgotten to wipe their boots; and there was that close, stuffy smell—spite of the vases full of fresh flowers, gathered that morning—usually left by crowded assemblies, that don't bring *mille fleurs*, or 'Jockey-club,' or *Eau-de-Cologne* with them on their pocket-handkerchiefs; and by one of the settees, was the nearly burnt out fag-end of a cigar, which, in the excitement of the moment, had been carelessly dropped, in all probability, by somebody fond of smoking, and who, when indulging himself at home, had no rich velvet-piled Axminster carpet to bother him:—and

as he pushed the chairs rather more into their proper places, the first feeling of dislike that he had ever felt for the place came over Sir Hugh ; and he inwardly vowed, as he dejectedly went up to find Arabella, "He would say good bye to it, and pitch his tent somewhere, where there was peace to be found, if it were in the back woods of America."

Alas ! though not to everyone's taste, even that is a region not to be arrived at so easily, with the deal Sir Hugh had on his hands, to get through, before he could "push his boat off, and snap his fingers at them !" Hugh Walcot, "though a fool, was no knave," Mr. Brockett said ; and, with his extensive experience of the article so called, if Jonathan Brockett, Esq., attorney at law, was not a competent authority, who was ? So, up, safe for the nonce, with Arabella, Sir Hugh sat down, and had some serious talk with her about the present threatening aspect of affairs ; and "how vitally indispensable it was to them, that some money should be got, somehow, without which, there



was no help for it, smash he must, and go to prison."

'Smash, and go to prison!' are ugly words, and Lady Walcot turned very pale, as ring after ring at the door bell confirmed what Sir Hugh, as he smoked *his* cigar on his back, calmly assured her, between the puffs, "must be his inevitable fate, before that day month, unless he could raise five or six thousand, somehow, to settle the small fry; and then they must fight Joel Yorke, inch by inch, as best they could, as long as they had a hold left."

Five or six thousand pounds was a large sum to find, when you wanted it, and every available means of money borrowing was exhausted; and Sir Hugh had nearly got to the end of the second cigar, without having arrived at the remotest conception of how to raise even five hundred. 'Ring—ring—ring,—when the deuce would they have done? What a treasure a cleaver-headed fellow like Rennie was!' and warming with it:—"If those

shares can only be bagged," mentally exclaimed Sir Hugh, in a cloud of smoke, "see if I won't raise him a peg higher. He's a devilish good fellow!—hark!—there they go again!"—and ringing for coffee, the poor beleaguered Knight donned his satin dressing gown, and making himself as, otherwise, comfortable as he could, under the circumstances, while Lady Walcot strewed the table with accounts, "just to shew him how they really stood, with regard to the tradespeople who were besieging them so,"—the fire burnt so bright, and, with the curtains drawn, and all the doors closed, and the down door bell at rest, the dressing room looked so snug and cozy, that, come what might, Maud should bring up her guitar, presently (as Annie had gone back for a day or two with Lady Gracechurch to 'The Bury,') and sing some of her Troubadour songs; and they would have a quiet happy evening together, if possible, for once in their lives."

To please dear papa, Maud brought up her guitar, when tea was over, and dear Mamma

had done writing ; and tuned it, and tried to sing ; but whether it was that she was not in her usual good key that night, or that dear Papa was unusually critical, she soon put it down again ; when Sir Hugh, falling asleep, Lady Walcot bethought herself for a moment, as if a sudden important thought had struck her ; and sending Maud down stairs for something, took the opportunity of her being away for a minute or two, to slip off his bunch of keys, on a side table, the little Bramah key that gave access to his deed-box, and put it in her pocket ; which done, she sat down, to revolve in her mind how best to carry out the purpose for which she had purloined it.

Sir Hugh seldom went to the box, so there was no fear of his missing it at present ; and Lady Walcot laid her head on her pillow, “ quite sure that if she succeeded in what she was bent on, he would forgive her an act, which, but that it was to save him from ‘ smashing and going to a prison,’ she would have as soon thought of being guilty of, as of chopping her hand off.”

And next day came a lull. Rennie was indeed a treasure! "If Sir Hugh would have the kindness to devote a day or so, up in his room, to cleaning his guns, or doing anything else he had a fancy for, people might suppose he was not at home, that he had gone to London, perhaps—and behave themselves better."

It was a hint not to be disregarded. And Clement being of the same mind, and domestically disposed, for a wonder, the guns and pistols and fire-arms, of all descriptions and denominations that Rennie could lay hands on were brought up for leisurely inspection; which by no means putting any restraint on Lady Walcot's movements, the day was open for her, to take any course she thought best for their conjoint welfare; and ordering the ponies to be round after luncheon, and Robert to be ready to go with her:—Mr Rennie wrapped the fur cloak round her Ladyship's knees, and gave her the tortoise-shell handled whip, and predicted "a beautiful day!" and rubbed his hands; and returning to Mrs. Battles, 'felt he couldn't exactly express to her how—'

"I know," said Battles, "just what I feel."

Mr. Rennie did not ask, 'how do you mean?' being well aware that that was not the way to get at it; but the look he gave her was ample!

"I mean," explained Battles, "that yesterday, ask me ever so, I wouldn't have said yes to anybody, no, not if I had doted on them to distraction!"

"And to day?" whispered Rennie, daringly stealing an arm round, when she wasn't aware of him—"say now—could you—could you—I know I couldn't—find it in your heart to say no?"

Battles was beaten. The battle was won. And come what might to the family, that was no reason why Roger Rennie and Dorothy Battles shouldn't put their savings together, and in a snug little 'all sorts shop,' set the world at defiance, as soon as, with all convenient speed, the gold hoop could be bought, and the Vicar of Millford make them man and wife.

The truth is, Roger Rennie had a quick eye,

and 'something' in my lady's smile that morning, inducing him to hope, "that when things were at the worst they might possibly mend," he infused such gaiety into them all below, by his sudden cheerfulness! that Battles' heart gave way; and cunningly taking advantage of the time when he knew an impressionable creature like Dorothy Battles was easiest assailed, he effected, by a bold stroke, what ninety-nine women out of a hundred, stout or slim, infinitely prefer in a man, who really means anything, viz., a downright 'yes' to a downright 'will you?' and his triumphant look all day, in consequence—had the door bell rung ever so—would have satisfied the creditors of one thing, that, "whoever else was in their black books, Roger Rennie owed them nothing, nor Dorothy Battles either."

'Necessity has no law,' says the proverb; and so reasoning, we suppose—as she rose some hours before Sir Hugh on the morning under notice—Lady Walcot possessed herself, by means of the little Bramah key, of her

marriage settlement deed, kept, with other private papers of value, in the tin box just spoken of; armed with which two sheets of parchment, rolled round in brown paper, like a common parcel, she made her way, as fast as the ponies could take her, to Mr. Swivel, Sir Hugh's man of business, in the anxious hope that, being worth six hundred a-year to her, from trust funds, the deed was available, by way of security, for at least what would suffice to rescue them from present perils. And faster and faster beat her heart, as she neared her journey's end, with the agitating thought of "what she should do if this last resource, this their sheet anchor, as she regarded it, should fail them?"

Drawing up at her milliner's in the High Street:—"Take the ponies to 'The Dolphin,'" said Lady Walcot to the page, "and I will come there to you;" and stepping with the brown paper parcel into Madame Schultze's, Bob Acorn whipped round into the Dolphin yard; and having consigned 'Darby and Joan' to the ostler, trimmed himself up a bit, and

pulling on his white cotton gloves, thought he would take a stroll about, and "see what there was to be seen, as well as his betters."

One turning led to another, till his saunterings brought Bob out at one end of Water Street, as Lady Walcot, with the parcel in her hand, came round the other. Bob's eyes were piercers; and not choosing to proceed any further in that direction, he stood up under a gateway for a minute or two, to let a waggon pass, and debate within himself, 'where my lady could be going to, in Water Street, if not to Mr. Swivel's? and if to Mr. Swivel's, what took her there? that's what he should like to know above all things!'

Unfortunately for the budget-full that Bob would have amazingly liked to have taken home with him, if he could, Oliver Swivel's street door, into which he watched 'my lady,' told no tales; and though Bob stood staring at it with all his might for full five minutes after 'my lady' had been let in, it gave no sort of sign, by which he could come to any conclusion at all, except that Mr. Swivel was



within, or she would have been out again long before he had peeled and eaten the two oranges he had just bought at the corner; wherefore, judging it wisest, to go back to 'Darby and Joan,' and see "how they were getting on," Bob did so; and a very sensible resolution it was, by which he gained golden opinions from 'my lady,' for always being "such a steady, mindful lad, and ready when he was wanted."

"Yes, Mr. Swivel was within," to-day; and the seedy, snuffy, old clerk, blinking at the elegant carriage and deportment of her ladyship, from under his up-turned spectacles, bowed her into a back room, and placing a chair, begged she would be seated, while he took her ladyship's card into Mr. Swivel.

The room was small and close, and smelt of a commixture of scents difficult to describe; the prevailing one being, as well as Lady Walcot's then anxious state of mind could take note of, a sickening compound of a fearful amount of bad sewerage and dirty old clothes and the fumes of strong waters, so commingled,

as to have defied all Atkinson's *bouquets* on the handsomest cambric pocket-handkerchief that was ever held to a nose. Indeed, to do Mr. Mumbles justice, he apologized as gracefully as he could, for "the other waiting room not being at liberty;" and "if dainty dames, full fig, would come and turn them out when they were having a tiffin-mouthful," as he very truly said to the office boy, "they must take their chance and put up with what they could get."

And that being Lady Walcot's determination just then, her patience during the quarter of an hour she had to keep her handkerchief up to her face, lest she should vomit, till Mr. Swivel was at liberty to receive her, was perhaps as exemplary an instance of acute fortitude as her whole life could bear record of. And when Mumbles signified "that if she would be pleased to follow him, Mr. Swivel was disengaged now," her head was aching so, she felt quite dizzy; and would have stumbled down the two steps into the presence, had not Mumbles cautioned her to

“take care,” with that commiserating smile which old accustomed denizens of dark holes bestow, pityingly, on new-comers, “not used to them” as much as they are.

Mr. Oliver Swivel still stood on the rolls, as ‘an attorney at law;’ and no unenviable position either, to judge by the society he was in. Great and good men stood above and below him, gentlemen, men looked up to and honoured, and beloved in every relation of life, Christian men, who had souls to be saved, and a Bar, themselves, to appear at, and come to a searching personal account with, some day, as well as their clients. And people called Mr. Swivel a gentleman, too. What said the proverb? *Noscitur a sociis*—you are known by the company you keep. And Mr. Swivel shook hands with great and good men, in the market place; and was on intimate terms with Baronets, and Knights, and Judges, and Grand Jurymen, and Magistrates, and Reverend Divines; aye, and more than one Lord, I daresay, and an Earl, and a Duke, too, very likely; but—and I deeply grieve

that truth compels the confession—there were some who knew him, among whom was Mr. Jonathan Brockett, who said, when speaking of Oliver Swivel, under their breath, that “he was a consummate ——;” but as they always stopped there, so must I, and without further queries, one way or the other, go on with the story.

Whatever else he might be Mr. Swivel was so far the gentleman, that he knew how to receive a lady, when she honoured him with a visit, whether professionally or ‘at home;’ also he was polished enough, to be very pleasing, if he chose; and though he had a carnal eye and a voluptuous mouth, he could discipline himself so completely, when occasion required it, that licentiousness had often quailed under his frown, when tempted to forget that excellent maxim, ‘There is a time for all things;’ and “to bring unnecessary scandal on what, judiciously indulged in, is not only allowable, but expedient, is very wrong.”

And Lady Walcot had not taken the chair that Mr. Swivel drew round for her, so as to

obtain the full light on her face, five minutes, before she felt much more at her ease than when she entered the room. Arabella Wimpole was, at seventeen, the toast of the county. She was Mrs. Hugh Walcot before she was eighteen; and now, though turned forty, was a splendid woman! and certainly looked ten years younger than she was—Oliver Swivel acknowledged that to himself, directly they came face to face. Although Mrs. Oliver Swivel was decidedly a plain woman, every one allowed that Oliver was “an excellent judge of female beauty! and if his wife hadn’t much of a face and figure, to boast of, she had brought him a pretty fortune; and a man couldn’t have everything in this world; and plenty of money was a very nice thing,” and so on; nor did scandal go further, in its comments on Mr. Swivel’s luxurious tastes and connubial life, than, now and then, to “wonder there were no more rows between them than there were. But then, true, Mrs. Swivel was a very hasty, jealous woman; and it was rather difficult for a man to shut his eyes and ears

always, when none but plain looks were present;" which being all by way of parenthesis, indulgent reader, let us see what Mr. Swivel said to the two sheets of parchment, signed and sealed, that, after a little introductory explanation, as to the motives of her visit, Lady Walcot put into his hand.

"Oh—ah—yes—to be sure"—smiled Oliver, spreading them out, and running his eye over a line or two,—“let me see—have I ever had—”

"No, I believe not," anticipated Lady Walcot; "to my knowledge, it has never been out of our possession."

Who knew better than Oliver Swivel, when he had had it in his hand last, however Sir Hugh, not to needlessly vex her, had concealed it from his wife?

Swivel read on.

"You are aware how pressed he is," ventured Lady Walcot, dropping her voice, not to disturb him too much, but still finding it impossible to sit quite mute.

"Yes."

"It occurred to me, if you could have obtained him enough by it, to—"

"Yes, yes—exactly."

"To satisfy Mr. Yorke, and pay off what else is troubling him so; then, in a little time perhaps, when he can turn himself round, something may be done, to—"

"Very true," and Swivel laid the parchments on his knee. "I am sure no one would be more rejoiced than myself, if, in any way"—and he took up the deed again, and squared his jaw, as if deeply interested.

"You see the present income from it," put in Lady Walcot, flushed with hope, "is full six hundred a year?"

"Eh—ah—yes, to be sure it is—and a nice little income, too, to fall back on."

Lady Walcot thanked Heaven for it in her heart! but being woman of business enough, to know that that had nothing to do with the way in which lawyers looked at it, she governed herself admirably; and though both Oliver Swivel's ears were wide open, notwithstanding the parchments hid his eyes from her,

she said nothing, in reply ; and so, if they were on the watch for woman's weaknesses, they were not gratified. And the clock on the mantel-piece had ticked away far more than two minutes, before doubling up the deed :—

“Will you leave this with me for a day or two?” he asked, cheerfully.

Lady Walcot hesitated.

“By Tuesday, I could tell you positively what you want to know.”

Still, Lady Walcot seemed undetermined.

“I think you said that Sir Hugh was not aware of your wish to consult me about it?”

Lady Walcot blushed :—

“It is the first time I ever concealed anything from him.”

“You did so in this instance, seeing no other means to effectually help him ? and feeling sure that, if you told him, he would be too generous to avail himself of your kindness ? Suppose we decide thus, then—to tell him, by all means, whether we succeed or not, as soon as we know for certain, and not before ? What's the good of bothering him unneces-



sarily? He is so excitable, he would have no peace till the time comes."

"On Tuesday, you say?"

"Yes. Shall I let you know, or will you favor me with a call again?"

"That will be best. At what time?"

"When you please—between—let me see—would four o'clock be convenient?"

"Quite so."

"That will suit me very well. And by then you may be sure I shall have done my utmost"—and Oliver Swivel held out both hands, as Lady Walcot rose from her seat—"to meet your wishes in every way. And I don't see at all why, if we can get what we want"—looking down on the deed—"we should not, while we are about it, make things more comfortable for him than they have been for years past. Alas! alas! it is so easy to give advice, isn't it, and so difficult to follow it sometimes?" and throwing open the door into the narrow dark passage that led to the front—the rustle of his wife's stiff silk dress, sweeping round the cor-

ner of the stairs, brought the blood into Oliver's cheeks, as, having committed her ladyship to the safe conduct of Mr. Mumbles, to escort her to the street-door, he returned to his arm-chair—with "the full conviction that she had been eaves-dropping; and that there were no prizes in this life, without their penalties; and that a man who marries a woman for her money, must take the good with the bad, and stomach a great deal. But there's one comfort," smiled Oliver Swivel, internally, as he doubled up the nice little fortune, to fall back on, of £600 per annum, "it's an ill wind that don't blow somebody good—just to think of the times I have tried to get these parchments under lock and key, and all I could do, he wouldn't let me have them—ha! ha! ha!—got them now, haven't I, safe enough?—what a soft fool he must be, not to take better care of himself than that!" and ringing the thumb-bell for Mumbles:—

"How about that writ of Aaron Nathan's? have you heard?"

;

"Issue execution on Monday," muttered Mumbles, scratching his leg.

"Taken an affidavit to it, have they? Who told them he was going to be off?"

Mumbles poked about, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't believe it, Mumbles," said Mr. Swivel, locking up his drawers. "Mind you, I had no hand in that."

Mumbles dropped his old grey chin, till it touched the snuff on his neckcloth; and limping away to his stool, buried his unhappy old face in his hands. But what his cogitations were over that wretched dull desk, while Lady Walcot was hurrying home,—after having dropped a sovereign into his withered palm,—full of fresh hopes, which the hoary old sinner knew were all moonshine, as well as his master did, this story does not concern itself with; so we must leave the shuffling, shambling old man to his own reflections, and, returning to Yorke House, begin another chapter.

## CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH, BESIDES OTHER DEEPLY INTERESTING MATTERS TO THOSE CONCERNED, ARE TWO LOVE LETTERS, UNLIKE ANYTHING OF THE KIND TO BE FOUND ANYWHERE IN 'THE POLITE LETTER WRITER.'

BUT before proceeding to the narration of other graver matters, incidental to this critical period in our story, first, what about 'The Ghost in the Battered Hat,' for which Miss Mabel was to "look out," Roland said, "exactly as the town clock was striking eleven," on the same eventful day we have

recording some memorable events of in the last chapter ?

As the chimes told the quarter to the agitating moment when 'The Ghost' would arrive, and pull the door bell of Yorke House, Mabel left her brother to the care of Nanny ; and descending to the front parlour, walked round it several times, as if, to judge by the composure of her face, she was thinking of nothing but of Aunt Eleanor's expected arrival, to pass an hour or so with her, before luncheon, and such an event as the sight of a 'live ghost,' in less than fifteen minutes, was so ordinary an occurrence, it was not worth troubling her head about. Then, the parlour having but little to interest her, and there being ten minutes more to get through, before all the blood would be out of her cheeks, what, if she went and had a chat with Nelly ; who had a wonderful way of engaging the attention, when she told you anything she had picked up, and you were not in a hurry, but would let her tell it her own way, which was generally the safest, to bring it to an end, all in good time, if you would have

patience. It was a shrewd thought of Mabel's. And the old clock ticked away so magically fast, before Nelly had come to one half of what she was full of, that—"Hark!"—yes, as sure as fate! it was striking the hour—and tinkle, tinkle, gently went the bell in the passage, and off flew Mabel to the street-door, her heart beating so! she felt, "if it had been to save her life, she couldn't have trusted her tongue to talk to even Clement himself, let alone his ghost, trembling as she was."

"My love!—my darling!" and pressing her niece to her bosom—if that were the hug of a ghost, well Roland might call it a 'live one.' And well poor Mabel, though she loved Auntie dearly! might require a moment or two to recover from the sudden joy! and collect her scattered senses, and make it clear to dear Auntie, "how wild with delight she was to see her! and how kind it was of her to come! and how eagerly she had been expecting her! and—"

"What a scandalous shame it is of me!" laughed Auntie, throwing off her warm wraps

for a long sit, "to cruelly disappoint you both in this way!"

"Disappoint?"

"Not a bit of it! You thought it was Auntie pulled the bell, did you not? Like my pull, eh? There he is, though, opposite, the scapegrace! in that ragamuffin old hat and jacket not worth a shilling—come here—" going to the window—"look at him, peeping round the corner—I wonder the policeman suffers it—there he is, waiting till—you will never guess what—I beckon him over—serve him right if I gave him in charge."

Awful as it was, Mabel clapped her hands for joy! for she divined what had befallen, viz., that there had been an unlooked for rencontre, in the street, between the Ghost and Auntie; who pinning him to the spot, he, of the battered hat, had not only to cry *peccavi*, but then and there also, before she would permit him to move an inch, to satisfy her as to his motives for prowling about Yorke House, where her niece was, at that time of day? the which heroically confessed, as was

the chivalric wont of him, of the shattered suit, in matters of conscience, he got permission to go opposite, within eye-reach, and there to wait patiently, for his presumption, till it might please Miss Eleanor Poynts to lift her finger over the blind, when he might come across, if he liked, and deliver any parcel or message he was charged with to Miss Yorke—provided always, she, Eleanor Poynts, as her maternal aunt and guardian, was at perfect liberty to scrupulously investigate the same, if she saw fit.”

In short, caught in the fact, the Ghost had no help for it, but to humbly own on what errand he had come, viz., “to humbly deliver to Miss Yorke a book, that the Rev. Roland Yorke had asked him to lend his sister, with his Reverence’s entire sanction ; and, furthermore, to humbly hope Miss Yorke was well ; and, furthermore, if he might have an instant’s speech of her, to say that he had seen Aunt Poynts, in Wool Street, though she had not seen him, and how remarkably well and young and handsome she was looking ! better and



younger and handsomer, he thought, than ever! though she was too beautifully dressed a great deal, in that magnificent new black velvet mantle and sable trimmings, which became her so! to notice such a poor, forlorn, beaten about, battered-in chap as he was, in the sunshine."

And "now, then," laughed Auntie, shooting up a finger over the blind frame, "just mark the disreputable sort of figure he cuts! in defiance of all I can say—did you ever see such a guy?" but seeing only that 'The Battered Hat' was half way across the road, off flew Mabel to the door, just in time to open it, as the Ghost's grasp was on the bell handle; and the distracted look he gave her, as he put the book in her hand, and, with the quickness of lightning, conveyed something into his breast pocket, which she gave him in exchange, sent her back to dear Auntie with so woe-begone a face! that Auntie, sitting down, fell into a musing fit for five minutes or more; during which Mabel had to run up and see how Joel was? and then to run into her own room, to see

what else besides 'Longfellow's last' there might be in the parcel? and then to run down again, and be at dear Auntie's sole and exclusive service for as long as Mrs. Stern would have the charity to delay her call for her, when 'Snow-ball' had gone the shopping rounds that were to give Auntie till nearly luncheon time "to judge with her own eyes how her nephew Joel was? and whether she could say a word of comfort to him, in any way, for his loss of Annie, so as to induce him to feel more kindly to them at the Rookery, than he was doing, by all accounts."

"They are in sad trouble, the Walcots, I am afraid?" began Aunt Poynts, as soon as Mabel took her chair beside her. "Well Clement may carry such a forlorn look. But why don't he set to work and do something?"

"He is writing an epic poem."

"Epic barley-sugar baskets!"

"He says he is very sanguine about it!"

"Yes, so he told me; and means, if he can, to get as much by it, no doubt, as his father

by his Bacon and Cabbage shares. Meanwhile, what is to be done for them? or, rather, can anything be done for them, for that is the question?"

"I only wish I had the money," exclaimed Mabel, her lustrous black eyes filling with tears, at the thought of "how happy she should be then!"

"And what, if you had?" enquired Aunt Eleanor, drawing herself up.

"You'd see what I'd do, Auntie, as sure as fate!"

"My love, what a way to express yourself!"

"There now, and the Colonel says 'I am so much improved!'"

"Ah—you and the Colonel! Something like the blind and the lame, faith! You would have made a very good soldier's wife, with a little drilling. But I am talking now of Clement. What a pity it is he don't turn his mind seriously to some settled, manly pursuit, and stick to it; otherwise, what will become

of him ? He can't even take his aunt Agatha's legacy, till he has made—how much is it—by the sweat of his brow ?”

“Only ten pounds.”

“And when is the new epic poem to astonish the world ?”

“About Christmas, he says.”

Auntie pondered it over for a minute.—

“Really I don't know, and that's the truth, what he is fit for.”

It was ticklish ground they were getting on now ; and Mabel looked up in Auntie's face, enough to say, “I am as much puzzled as you are.”

“If he don't like either of the professions, (mercantile life is out of the question) why not make haste and earn that £10, before his next birthday ; and then, as he loves a rural life, take some land, and farm it ? Anything better than idleness, for man or woman, on just enough to be elegantly useless.”

The idea of the farm was very pleasing to Mabel ; indeed, just what she had thought of many a time ; and her eyes sparkled so ! that

Auntie was emboldened to go on with the little scheme that she and the Vicar and the Colonel had been talking of together that very morning at Millford.

“No use to think of ever taking that poet’s soul out of him,” continued Auntie; “he was born with it, that’s clear, and it will go with him to the grave. By the bye, that’s a good thought—our boys and girls are to have a grand treat on my birthday, when I open my new Alms Houses, and an appropriate, plain, intelligible address, in verse, on the occasion, by way of inauguration, would not be out of place—remind me to speak to him about it.”

“To Clement?”

“Do you know of any one else who would do it better?”

“Oh, dear, no! Won’t he jump for joy, that’s all!”

“My love! my love!—what can the Colonel be thinking of? High time I got you back under my thumb again. You think Clement would fall in with the ‘snug house, and farm round it?’”

“ Trust him !”

Auntie drew in her breath.

“ I should think he *would indeed* !”

“ Why lay so much emphasis on it ? Supposing you had said, instead, ‘ Indeed I hope so ;’ don’t you think it would have answered all needful purposes, my dear, and been more elegant ?”

Mabel pouted her lip :—

“ You musn’t forget, Aunt dear, must you, I’m a Yorke, not a Poynts ?” and checking herself, “ It’s being in the old house, perhaps, and seeing nobody much but Nanny and Nelly all day, has a good deal to do with it—now don’t you think so ? You’ll see what a perfect pattern I shall be, when I come back to you, Auntie. And did you tell Clement about the farm ?”

“ How was it possible ? and till just now, for three minutes at the top of the street, I have not set eyes on him since I came over. No. But I mean to see his father on Monday or Tuesday, and have a good talk with him about

it. Poor man! I expect he will be only too happy to say yes, to any feasible chance for him, in their present difficulties."

Mabel dropped her swimming eyes on her lap, and sighed.

"If there were any possible way to help them," continued Auntie; after thinking a moment; "but they seem to be so deeply involved, it is not a little, Roland was saying this morning, will do them any good. Otherwise, if only for poor Lady Walcot's sake and the dear girls, I don't doubt but that—"

But the Vicar and Roland's ring at the bell interrupting the *tête-à-tête*; and the Rector of Lyncourt, with the Colonel, following a few minutes after, to make kind enquiries, &c., what there was in Auntie's mind to personally do for them, if she could, found no utterance for the present. And as Joel, though so much better, after a good night's rest, as to be sitting propped up in his arm chair by the fire, would see no one but his Aunt, and her only for a few minutes—the Vicar's intended "talk with

him" was again frustrated. And Mrs. Stern coming to the door, to say "Auntie's time was up, and that she was in a great hurry to get home"—another kiss—and another—and another—and "good bye, my darling," added Auntie; "I shall come and see you again, if I can, on Monday or Tuesday, after I have been to the Rookery—good bye, my love—and—and—if I drop on that scapegrace Clement again, is there anything I can say to him for you?"

"Yes, oh, yes, Auntie dear, tell him, don't forget, that it was very kind indeed of him to write my name in the book; and that I shall read the parts very attentively he has marked with pencil—and that—I daresay they are very beautiful!"

"You don't know yet what they are, I suppose?" and shaking an admonitory finger at her, off went Auntie, full of a hundred things she had to do; but the ninety nine out of which, though they must all be done, somehow, were a feather's weight with her, com-



pared with the heavy load on her mind, since Roland had told her, that morning, how Sir Hugh really stood, and that if money were not found somewhere, he would be arrested to a certainty in a few days, unless he quitted the country—and then what would become of them? It was, as Mabel said, when talking of Clement, and the necessity there was to do all they could to make a settled character of him—"maddening to think of it!"

And now, while Joel ate the cup of broth that Nanny took up to him, Miss Mabel went into her room, and sitting down on the bed, opened the parcel again, that The Ghost had given her with those piteous looks, as if to say, "I suppose you know it is all up with us at the Rookery? And now I may go and shoot, or hang, or drown myself, for as to living without *you*, that's impossible! for who, in her senses, would have a poor, beaten about, battered in chap like I am?"

Love is quick to read looks, and interpret the faintest sigh; but never was there such a

love-letter as Mabel held tight with both hands in her lap, as again and again she conned it over and over, from the first word to the last, lest a thought should have escaped her, or she had mis-read any of the meanings, which scribbled off in pencil, and evidently in a fit of despair, would have puzzled any one, to quite see the rationale of, but Mabel herself. In fact, it was a strange composition, it's brevity being the strangest part of it, in Mabel's opinion ; for, " while he was about it, surely he might have torn off rather a larger scrap of paper, and found time, besides the postscript, for more than a dozen lines ? There it was, however, such as it was ; and, long or short, she to whom it was addressed set some store by it, seemingly, to judge by the way she kept hugging it on her knees, and then gazing at it again and again, till she could see it no longer, for the tears that blinded her ; when wiping them away, she took it up once more, and calmly reading it out to herself half aloud—my ' little bird ' cocked his ear, and taking a hop or two nearer, greatly increased

my obligations to him, as the following will attest:—

“The ‘Old Seat,’ Saturday.

“HONORED MISS,

“I cannot quit these, my native parts, which I must soon do, I suppose, now all these terrible troubles have come on us, without wishing you good bye, dear, honored Miss, and hoping, from the bottom of my heart, you may be happy, and continue to enjoy every blessing on earth to the last hour of your life. Dear Miss, I shall often think of you when I am far away. And oh, dear, honoured Miss, may a poor, beaten-about, battered-in chap, the like of me, hope you will sometimes cast a thought on him? and, come what may, believe that he will remain—till death, if he shouldn’t see you again, your ever faithful and devoted and humble and obedient servant,

“CLEMENT.

“P.S.—I have taken the liberty to write your beloved and honored name, dear Miss, in the little book your Reverend brother requested me

to *lend* you, in the humble hope that you will condescend to accept it, as I have heard you express an admiration for its author. If I never see you again, dear, honored Miss, Heaven bless you; and befriend him, who, when away from you, will never hold up his head again."

It was a strange epistle certainly; but if Mabel, with it in her lap, fancied twenty things he might have said, in a happier spirit, that she would have liked better; what was Clement—sitting disconsolate on 'the old seat,' with 'Honored Miss's' no less characteristic cross-correspondence on his knee, to make out of such a curiosity as, again, by the untiring kindness of my 'little bird,' I am enabled to here add, as equal to anything ever achieved, in the love-letter line, worthy of immortality:—

"The Front Kitchen, Thursday Night.

"DEAR MR. CLEMENT, SIR,

"What do you think Nelly has just told me? That there was a live Ghost, the image

of young Mr. Walcot, of The Rookery, walking up and down opposite, in an old slouched hat, pulled over his eyes, and not worth sixpence, for more than an hour this afternoon, and staring up at Yorke House in the most *oudacious* manner! And to think that I didn't know it, isn't it maddening? Is it true, that Ghosts, if not scared away by anything, always take the same walks exactly at the same times? Nelly says it is. Whether or no, shan't I be on the look out between two and three to-morrow, and next day, and the next, and every day after, for a week? for I wouldn't miss seeing him, as he passes, for all the golden guineas in Gloucestershire. And now good night, for the clock is striking twelve, and you never heard such a racket as the rats are making in the back parlor—that dreadful room which turns my blood cold whenever I pass it. Oh, I wouldn't live in the frightful old house, as Joel does, for the wealth of the world! If it were not for Nanny and Nelly, I couldn't stop, where it ever so, for sometimes I feel as if I could hardly breathe; but

they are so kind and thoughtful; and I have had my meals in the kitchen since I came; and am writing this on the old flap-table drawn out near the fire, while Nelly is fast asleep, with her feet on the fender, keeping me company? for I don't want to go to bed before I must, it is so dull up there, where I sleep, over the back parlor. You should hear the terrible noise those horrid rats are making. Isn't it odd they should come there, and nowhere else in the house, Nelly says; and all the poison she can put, don't scare them a bit? Good night. Nelly has just woke, so I cannot say any more now—except what you know—and if not—then, believe me, Dear Mr. Clement, Sir, ever your faithful and devoted servant,

“MABEL.

“P.S.—Roland will tell you all about business matters. My greatest trouble, as well as his, is that we are so powerless. How are you getting on at home? My thoughts are always with you. Nelly says I may be quite

sure the Ghost will come again to-morrow at the same time, as the policeman did not meddle with him."

Clement smiled, as he contemplatively returned the letter to the little nook nearest his heart; but there was bitterness at the bottom of it, as turning homeward, "Oh, what a scene awaits me there!" he mentally exclaimed. "Where shall we be this day six-months? 'Home, sweet home, there is no place like home.' What a farce! There is no place I dread so much. O God, give me but a shepherd's hut, with *her*, and peace, and how my soul would thank Thee! Ah, I wonder how *she* would respond to that? Call me a silly enthusiast perhaps, and tell me, 'rather to go and break stones on the road, than talk such nonsense.' Nonsense! What mean nine out of ten, when they throw *that* in your teeth? 'See as *I* see—hear as *I* hear—do as *I* do, if you want to be wise.' Absence makes the heart grow fonder, does it? We

shall see. No, no, not always"—and Clement gloomed on in silence for some minutes.—Then, "there's a mean, selfish, craven thought!" he exclaimed; "the miserable mistake of that! Mabel Yorke false? Pshaw!—

'They say that she is happy now,  
'The gayest of the gay;  
'They hint that she forgets me,  
'But I heed not what they say;  
'Like me, perhaps, she struggles  
'With each feeling of regret,  
'But if she loves as I have loved,  
'She never can forget.'—

and to the sweet consoling tune of it, Clement sought his mother. And forgetting everything, in his solicitude for her, but that he was her son, and ought to be a help and comfort to her, in her trouble—the 'old home,' with all its faults, was 'home' still. And where fond parents and fond children, in affliction, draw round each other, and concur in so thinking, 'there is no place like home;' however the angry storms, from without, may rage, and debts and duns come thundering at the door, and the rude, and rough, and vulgar leave



their polluting traces on the hearths, that would have been hallowed against every intrusion, with only that proper regard for self-respect, which is the best of all 'home's' safeguards.

## CHAPTER X.

SHOWS WHAT A SACRIFICE MABEL MADE FOR  
THAT 'SCAPEGRACE,' CLEMENT.

TUESDAY dawned; and Mr. Yorke, now so far recovered as to dispense with Nanny, or Nelly, in his room of a night, opened his eyes, and stared about him, and then shut them again, as if willing to sleep on, if he could; but seemingly, there was something troubling his thoughts, that kept him turning restlessly from side to side; till, finding no ease, he sat up, and clasping his hands on his breast, fixed his gaze, as if on some spectral object that haunted him—whose eye he could neither avoid nor

encounter, without the cold drops gathering on his brow, and making him tremble so, that the ricketty old bedstead he was lying on shook under him. And thus he remained, as though transfixed by some terrible spell, till the old clock on the stair-case striking seven, he shook off the icy hand that was choking him, and ringing Nanny up, bade her bring him his breakfast; having finished which, "Now go and tell Mr. Brockett, I want to see him," he said in a tone that admitted of no delay. "Do you hear?—now—and bid him bring with him—what I spoke to him about yesterday—go, go!"

"Please, Miss, to step in and see Master, while I run round to the Broadway," begged Nanny, putting her head in Miss Mabel's room, with her bonnet on, as if in a great hurry.

"To the Broadway, Nanny, so early as this? What's the matter?"

Nanny looked confused, and seemed too hurried to know what to answer.

How is my brother to-day?

"I took him up a large cup of tea, and two

thick slices of bread and butter, and he ate them both."

"Oh, indeed? That looks well. And he wants to see Mr. Brockett?"

"Now directly, he says;" and Nanny sunk her voice to a whisper; "but don't you think he had best consider it, Miss, a little longer, before—it's no business of mine to be sure—before he does anything he might be sorry for by and bye?—least-ways, that's my opinion."

"Yes, and so it is mine, too, Nanny."

"I know what I heard him say last night in his sleep," observed Nanny, gravely.

"Oh—something else?"

"Lor, did I tell you? There's a head I've got—what's come to it, I don't know—the house seems all topsy-turvy;—yes, I heard it as plain as you're talking now—'Have another word to say to him'—those were his very words—'to the son of the man who spits at me, will they?' and then he laughed, and said something about 'not a farthing,' but what it was, I couldn't make out. Only it's my opinion, Miss, you'd best see the lawyer,

before he goes up again, or, as sure as you're standing there, he'll be doing something dreadful, if it gets to his ears, who's looking up, opposite, every day, for an-hour and more, in that dirty old hat, pulled down over his eyes, as if that would hide him."

"Nanny, don't be so foolish! It's an easy place you must have, I'm thinking, if you can find time to be gaping and staring out of the window, by the hour, in that way—more than I can;" and away went Nanny on her errand, muttering to herself something about, "What a sin and pity it is, as Nelly says, Miss Yorke, with her prospects, don't look a deal higher than to throw herself away on a penniless pauper gentleman the like of him! for, if, they paid everyone their own, what would there be left, I should like to know?"

And now, before she went down to her breakfast, Mabel would "take a peep in at Joel, and see how he had slept? and what sort of mood he was in? and so judge what to say to Mr. Brockett when he came."

Joel glanced at her, as she entered the room,

and received her kiss, as usual, on his cheek, with a faint smile; which passing off, his features became rigidly fixed, and, this morning, there was a savage sternness in his look and manner that betokened the dark storm brewing in his brain. But Mabel was a Yorke, as well as Joel, and "had quite made up her mind to let brother Joel do as he pleased with his wealth, so that she might be at liberty to do as she pleased with her heart. Moreover, the bargain was made. She had disposed of her heart, to all intents and purposes, for value received—and when did a Yorke ever revoke their promise or break their word? Never, that she remembered ever hearing of, though it would have put all the gold in Yoxminster in their pockets!"

"You are better this morning, Joel? more like yourself again?"

Joel nodded.

"Did you enjoy your breakfast?"

"Didn't Nanny tell you I did?"

"Ah, now I am sure you are getting better, because you catch me up so—that's a sure

sign ! And what makes you want to see Mr. Brockett so early ? Going to cut me off, are you ? ”

“ Sneer at me, do you ? ”

“ No ! If I sneer—you know why ? ”

Joel grasped up the bed clothes.—“ Yes, I do—you won’t be dictated to ? ”

“ Would you ? ”

“ That’s another matter. Yes—if I were you, I *would*. ”

“ Whose blood runs in my veins, Joel, as well as in yours ? The same father’s and mother’s, don’t it ? ”

Joel’s lips quivered.

“ What has Clement ever done, to hurt you ? ”

“ His father spits at me—spits—spits at me—and you would marry his son, would you ? insult and defy me that way ?—see them triumph over me—my own sister—after spitting at me ?—the blood of the Yorkes that, eh ? ” and grasping her wrist—“ hark, Mabel, ” he added, in a tone of anguish that wrung her heart—(for she saw that Annie’s rejection of

him was the thought uppermost) "this is the last time I will ever speak to you on the subject—pass your word to me now—this moment—that you will have no further intercourse with any of them there—that you will renounce them, one and all, from this hour,—and Brockett shall put you down to day for half of all I am worth in the world—not less than Three Hundred Thousand Pounds—that I pledge myself to! as hope for—what—eh—eh—you don't mean you won't?"

"Break my word, and, may be, my heart, too, Joel, for Three Hundred Thousand Pounds?" returned Mabel, her eyes dim with tears.—"No, no—not if you could give me this grim ghostly old house filled from the cellar to the roof with gold and silver, would I do a deed which I could never hold my head up after—so, what would be the good of it to me?"

The froth stood on his lip. "That is your resolution, is it?" muttered Joel, in his throat.

"Yes, Joel; or, I should not be worthy of the name I bear."



"Go, go—that will do—that's enough—where's Nanny?"

"Not come back yet."

"Roland, too, to sneer at me—to dare to—"

"Be a Yorke, and love justice? Joel, Joel, how differently you would think of him, if you loved him as much as he deserves. Whatever you do, remember what our poor dear father would have done for him, if he had not been atrociously struck down as he was, just before —"

"What—what—eh—hark!"—as the down door bell rung,—“go, go—love him?—he loves me, don't he—and there yesterday—only yesterday—I saw him opposite, when I went to the window, arm in arm with the son of the man who spits at me—spits at me—yes, loves me, don't he, dearly? go—I can't talk any more—where's Nanny—I want her—send her up—do you hear?"

As she shook hands with Mr. Brockett, Mabel's blank looks told their own tale. The practised eye of the old lawyer required but few words to tell him how the case stood.

"Ah, I thought as much," he answered, when Mabel had related to him what had just happened; "but I'll be hanged if I mean to be in a hurry about it. I am to understand, I suppose, that that 5 and 4, put together, is equivalent, in Mr. Clement Walcot and Miss Mabel Yorke's opinion, to Three Hundred Thousand Pounds, on the conditions annexed to it?"

"Clearly."

"Very well, then,—for Roland's as bad as you are,—there goes Six Hundred Thousand, more or less, to charity, before this time to-morrow, if I keep my word with him. But, my dear young lady, I don't mean to do so. I shall be absolved, I daresay, for it, where I hope for pardon for worse sins than that. At all events, be as angry as he will, I shall plead overwhelming engagements, which is a fact, and try what another day or two's quiet conscience, all alone up stairs, and getting the Vicar to have a talk with him, if we can, will do, to relieve my own of a weight that presses rather heavier on it, I can tell you, than Mrs.

•

Brockett says befits a man of my standing and reputation. So, here goes, to make the best excuses I can for not bringing the deed with me, as I promised. In short, he shan't do *that* deed, if I can help it. I shall get it precious for my pains. But, you see, we lawyers are obliged to have thick skins, and lucky for us we have, come to deal with some of them, who lay it on us pretty frequently, with no more compunction than though we were Rhinoceroses. Now have your breakfast, then, while I go up. I shan't be ten minutes. You must turn out, for some fresh air, by and bye, or we shall have you, too, on the doctor's day-book. The atmosphere of Yorke House certainly is not the best in the world, that's clear."

"Well, and you feel more like yourself again to day," began Brockett, as he sat down on the chair by the bedside; "yes and you look ten per cent. better than you did yesterday, though weak as a rat, I shouldn't wonder, come to take half a dozen turns along wharfside. And do you think I don't know

why you are better? Ah, that blessed *mens conscia recti*! what brings backs the roses into the cheeks and, brightens the eyes, and makes us so happy as that? Do you imagine for a moment I'd have hurried off, without my breakfast, if I had'nt guessed what you wanted me for? You have thought it over? That's well. Now, then, you wish, after those little bequests, you were talking of, to Nanny and Nelly, and two or three others, to make an equal division of the remainder, whatever it may be, between your brother and sister, who stand first, by every right, legal and divine? Do you feel cold? Stay, let me put the shawl over you. There's a sharp frost out. And, by the bye, about the executors—I was going to say, why not let Roland—"

"Hark," caught up Joel, impatiently glancing towards the door, as Nanny's tread crossed the passage; "I didn't send for you, to tell me what to do, but to do what I told you. Where's the deed? I am master of my own, I suppose?"

"Now don't be angry! We lawyers had need have twenty four hours in the day, instead of twelve, to get through, sometimes—I've been up to my neck."

Joel's jaw fell.—"That don't help me."

"I'm not so sure of it, though. For if they carry their line to Birmingham, that way, I'll tell you what it is, you'll get swinging compensation for all that piece of rough land there, by Holly Lane, and, most likely, the Copse, too. Leave me alone for knowing what it's worth. There was another meeting about it yesterday at the Town Hall, and I don't see what's to prevent them setting to work, now they have got their bill. They talked of going over the ground, here, to-morrow or next day. You don't dabble in shares, or, now's your time."

"Eh—what—going where—over?—"

"Millford Mead, straight along the level, through Holly Lane, to Lyncourt."

Joel's eyes, which, in the excitement of the moment, had glared at his lawyer as he spoke fell again on his hands, and there remained

fixed, by which, and the nervous twitching of his mouth, Brockett concluded he was already counting up, in his mind's eye, what he should profit by his surrender to the company of a detached strip of his Millford property, which paid him so little, that he might well hail the chance of making a good thing by it.

Evidently the thought of it had diverted his mind from what was engrossing it the moment before; and Brockett rubbed his hands, as he rose to say "good bye for the present," in hope that, "by exciting his lust for gain, Joel's wrath against Sir Hugh would have time to cool, before he did a deed, which, however he might be 'master of his own,' as he called it, would haunt him unceasingly to the last moment of his life."

"Good bye! You must give me a day or two longer, about that other matter," smiled Brockett, brushing round his hat with his handkerchief; "for till those chaps have done with their meetings and measurings, there's no getting on with anything. Turn it over, between now and next time I see you, what

you think we ought to make them come down with for it, if they cut through the Copse as well? Yes, and by the bye, that's a good thought—I don't see why I shouldn't give you what it's worth, for half a dozen cart loads of gravel out of the pit there, for my garden, before they get it all. It's the best gravel anywhere between this and Rexford; and you might have turned a pretty penny by it, if you had taken my advice."

Joel lay back, and breathed heavily.

"You feel weak, eh? Well, then, I won't bother you any more. Why don't you try an egg beaten up in milk? Afford it, can't you? I may have the gravel, eh? Grix knows all about the price. Good bye! That reprobate fellow Ralph's out again. Roland told you, I suppose? Quite an altered man, they say. The Vicar has got him in hand. And Betsy Bond, too; so, there's every chance for them. He's going to marry her."

Joel stared!

"Did'nt they tell you—he's the father of the child?"

"Oh—eh—marry her—going to live?"

"With Martha—why not?—he's an able-bodied fellow, and—"

"No, no—shan't—shan't live there!"

"Well, they must go somewhere else, then, that's all. If he'll work, I don't see why he shouldn't. Fair play for every man—give him a chance—I mean to let him get me in that gravel—a good week's job for him, to begin with. Farewell! I'll tell Nanny to beat you up an egg. Nine for sixpence now—it won't ruin you."

Little as she built on it for herself, Mabel's eyes glistened as Mr. Brockett told her how well he had succeeded in drawing Joel's thoughts off the instant making of his will, into another channel; "but there was a restless anxiety in her brother's look and tone," he said, "which boded no good either to himself or anyone else around him—deep care was evidently preying on his mind;"—and Jonathan Brockett went back home, more than ever convinced of one thing, viz., "that you may lie on a bed of gold, and find it by no means as comfortable as a



shake down of clean straw in a cock-loft—with that *mens conscia recti* he was talking of—that clear conscience—which, whatever silly people might say, of solicitors knowing little about, he begged to assure them, he, as an attorney at law, prized beyond measure, as one of his most intimate acquaintances; as was evident by the way he always went on whistling of a morning, while he was shaving himself—which he would defy any man to do, attorney, or otherwise, if over night he had laid his head on his pillow, with the knowledge that he had, either by word or deed, been wronging his fellow-creature.”

## CHAPTER XI.

## RALPH AND BETSY.

IN the afternoon of the day spoken of in the foregoing chapter, as the sun-dial on the south-east face of Millford old church said it was about three o'clock, a passer along either of the gravel-paths that cut the churchyard into four nearly equal semi-circles, would have seen two figures bent in grief over an infant's new made grave; one of them, a tall, stout, strong-built man of, apparently, the labouring class, aged thirty or thereabouts; the other, a slim, pretty, pale-faced young woman, some seven

or eight years his junior, seemingly husband and wife, or brother and sister, mingling their tears over the fresh laid sod. And, presently, the man took his fellow mourner by the hand; and, after saying something to her, they simultaneously knelt down, and kissed the turf again and again; and laid their arms over it; and seemed to hug what it covered to their hearts, as if it were a treasure to them precious above all things on earth! and which was all their own, and loved and clung to them as much as they loved it.

And the last prayer offered up—they rose. And walking, arm in arm together, to a flat open grave-stone a few paces off, they sat down on it; and keeping their gaze fixed on the green spot they had just left, held each other tight by the arm, as if all their comfort was then in each other, and all past pains and aches, and dark days, and darker nights were as nothing, compared with the pure peace and joy that day's holy union of heart and soul had given them.

And looking up into his face, Betsy laid her

cheek on Ralph's shoulder; and smoothing the other with his great rough hand, he bent his head down, and kissed it fondly.

And the dial gave no further account of how fast the hours had flown since they set out from Martha's cottage, on their mutual errand of parental love. And they slowly wended their way, by the green lanes, home again. And as they walked along, Ralph became thoughtful—so thoughtful, that Betsy asked him, "what he was thinking of, that he had not spoken a word hardly, all along Copse-side?"

"Of something"—and Ralph's chest heaved—"something I've as good as made up my mind I'll go and out with to the Vicar, before another night's over."

Betsy turned pale as ashes; and tightening her hold of his arm, they walked on, nearly to the copse, in silence.

"It's nothing to fear about," explained Ralph, huskily, "come to the truth of it; only, it do look ugly, that's what I mean, all those lies I've told about it."

"Oh, Ralph!"—and Betsy clung still tighter to him—"I thought—I made sure we were going to be so happy!"

"Sure, and so we will, never fear! All I mean is, I wish, now, I'd told before I came out; but, somehow, I couldn't—I didn't like—it looked so ugly, all those lies."

"Lies, Ralph! about what?" and, but for the strong arm on which she leant, Betsy felt she must have sunk to the earth.

"About the murder there—at Yorke House—don't you remember?"

"Oh, Ralph! what—what do you mean?" and he was obliged to sit down, and take her on his knee, and untie her bonnet, and kiss her cold cheeks, and call God to witness "that he had had no more hand in it, one way or the other, than their dead babe in its grave," before the blood circled again in her veins, and she was able to walk on with him. Then she breathed freer again, as he confessed to her about the 'lies he had told,' as he called them; but when she reached her mother's gate, and

he was following her in, she stopped short, and placing her open hand resolutely on his chest:—

“Ralph,” she said, looking at him earnestly, “the Almighty knows I believe you; but never, never, if it break my heart, shall you cross that door to me, nor will I to you, till you have cleared yourself to the Vicar and Miss Grey, and given back, as you say you can, that money.”

“And that I’ll do, this blessed night, please God!” exclaimed Ralph, turning away sorrowfully, “before I put bread again into my mouth, come what will of it!” and striding off towards the Parsonage—we must leave Ralph for the present, and taking up another thread of the story, follow Aunt Poynts to The Rookery, where she was to go “either on Monday or Tuesday,” she said, “to have a serious talk with Sir Hugh.”

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE 'MAD BULL' AND THE MONEY LENDER.

SUNDAY is 'a day of rest;' and Sir Hugh found it so, 'dunned to death almost' as he was every other day of the week. However creditors may wish it over sometimes, it is scarcely ever too long for poor debtors. But Monday comes, and then—who is there who don't know what Monday brings with it, in one shape or another, besides Mr. Roger Rennie and Mrs. Dorothy Battles?

Lady Walcot had to face the storm again on Monday, while Sir Hugh was still busily engaged up stairs, with his fire arms, and a

choice box of Regalias, the fumes of which “sent quite a *bookette* all over the house,” Rennie said. Practice makes perfect, they say, and poor Lady Walcot almost began to look for ‘Please, my lady, you’re wanted,’ as naturally as for the *Times* and *Morning Post* with her breakfast; till she got so *au fait* at bowings in and bowings out, it was quite a new life to her; though it flushed her rather, every now and then, when occasionally a ‘rougher customer’ than ordinary had to be pacified, who rapping out oaths, and waving his arms terrifically! to frighten her, and smelling horribly of beer and tobacco, bade her, “if she couldn’t pay him, to go and sell those rings on her fingers, and that fine dress on her back, or borrow the money from some of her rich relatives, for paid he would be, so help him!”—satan ought to have been it, but that was not the name used—“or he’d shew her what he’d do, so help him—!”

Oddly enough, twelve struck on Tuesday, and not once had the hall-door bell made Lady Walcot’s heart sink, and Sir Hugh



"wonder who the devil was that?" There was what might be termed an unnatural stillness in the house; and while Lady Walcot prepared for a ride out in the pony carriage—to where or for what Sir Hugh never dreamed of asking her—he measured his dressing-room from end to end, half-a-mind to have Daredevil round, and take a canter over to little Podge's. He was "rich as a Jew! and could stump up with five thousand, without missing it, if he liked;" and the Knight's hand was on the bell, when Lady Walcot entered hurriedly, with a face pale as death, and drawing him by the arm to the window, so that the curtain might hide them from observation:—

"Look there, under the wall," she said, "by the ivy—who is he?"

But the hat, if a hat it were, ducked down out of sight; and though they stood still and kept their eyes on the spot for full ten minutes, it was gone. And Sir Hugh breathed again. And lighting another cigar, saluted his lady on the cheek, and wished her a pleasant ride, as he gave another glance at the ivy. And when the

roll of the wheels had died away, he sat down, and throwing his legs out, was very sad within himself for half an hour. Then, he went to the window again, and never took his gaze off the ivy for five minutes. And once he could have sworn he saw a man's eyes peeping at him through the foliage, but the next minute they disappeared; and rubbing his own, he felt they were quite moist and dim, so that it "must have been a mere fancy of his—it was not likely anyone would be sneaking about there all that time, for nothing—hark!"

It was the afternoon post from Rexford; and Rennie brought up the letter for Sir Hugh Walcot, Knight; and there being no present commands for him, he went back to his own business, and Mrs. Battles, no less pleased with the holiday the door bells were having, than his master was.

Sir Hugh sat, as if transfixed, with the note grasped in his fist, utterly at a loss to conceive what it meant. He had received many a puzzling epistle in his life, but this beat them all! The handwriting was a woman's, and the

pen had evidently shaken not a little, in the process ; and thus it ran :

“ PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL. .

“ As this is not the first time that your wife’s Marriage Settlement has been to Water Street, unavailably, as you are aware, why is it here again now, and brought by Lady Walcot? It may be of as much importance to you, as to anyone else, to have that question answered satisfactorily. If you have any doubts about it, you can resolve them, or not, as you think fit, at four o’clock, p.m., to-morrow, Tuesday.

“ A FRIEND.”

“ A trap !” was Sir Hugh’s first exclamation, when he had read it twice through ; and crossing one leg over the other, it struck him, “ as being unfortunate for the writer, whoever he or she might be, that there was the settlement deed, all safe and snug, in the tin box in his wardrobe ; with which, mechanically snatching up his bunch of keys, as they lay within reach among a heap of books and

papers and old magazines and cigar boxes, &c., he kept absently twiddling one key after the other, till it seeming to him that 'the little Bramah' was a long time coming, he held the bunch up with both hands,—and, lo and behold!—"Where the deuce is it?" exclaimed the Knight, starting to his feet and flushing scarlet! "It was there, I'll be sworn, the other day, when I went to the box for that last receipt of Brockett's, for I saw it with my own eyes—odd—very odd!" and pacing up and down,—“Impossible!—impossible” he muttered—“she would never have done it, not she without, mentioning it to me first;” and running his eye over the note again—“Gone the deed is somewhere, there's no doubt of that;” and Sir Hugh fixed his gaze on the fender, while a cramping feel came over him, the like of which, with all his troubles (enough to paralyse most men) he had never felt before in his life. “Hark!—that infernal bell again!” and up came Rennie, all smiles, to say “Miss Poynts was in the boudoir, and wished to see him.”

“Confound it! and here’s a figure I am!  
• how can I go down in this state?”

Rennie “could see no fault.”

“Must I—that’s the question?” as Rennie helped him on with a loose morning coat, in place of the dressing gown.

“She asked if you were in, so pleasant-like, I couldn’t refuse her.”

“Ah! eh?—put some eau de Cologne on my handkerchief—those old ladies know the smell of baccy by heart. Now, then, shew her in the library—and I’ll be down in a minute.”

“Miss Poynts is in the boudoir,” reminded Rennie; “I shewed her there, because—”

“Ah, yes, very well—that was right—no, by the bye, the library’s better—ask her in there—I shan’t be a moment;” and having drowned the ‘baccy,’ as well as he could, and spruced himself up a bit, down went Sir Hugh, like a jaded horse, lugged into harness again, when dead beaten, and that knows the only way ever to get back home, is to put his neck to the collar and go through it somehow, with a good heart.

Rennie was right. Aunt Poynts smiles were quite reviving! and so won on Sir Hugh, before they had chatted away, about this, that, and the other, for five minutes, that he “agreed with her entirely, as to the necessity there was for Clement to look facts in the face, and buckle to, in earnest, to some settled manly pursuit, instead of wasting his precious time as he was doing, writing epics and fly-fishing: and would be only too glad, if anyone would open his poetical eyes to the lamentable mistake he was making! of pursuing the shadow for the substance; for all he, his father, could say to him, to shew him the suicidal folly of it, was no good—and—”

“That is the very reason I have tried to catch you to-day,” smiled Miss Poynts, taking advantage of the sudden pause which a foot-fall on the gravel outside brought Sir Hugh to, before he had ended the sentence,—“to have a talk about him. He ought to be able to claim his aunt’s legacy shortly, and, as yet, where is the indispensable ten pounds required?”

Sir Hugh shrugged his shoulders. "If I had ten thousand to give him, it wouldn't do, eh, would it?" with a glance at the window, as the wind swayed the creepers, over it, to and fro, and kept beating them so against the top panes, that you might have almost fancied, if you had been as nervously excitable as Sir Hugh was, that somebody was outside, tapping to you.

"The conditions are express and positive," went on aunt Poynts; "it must be ten pounds of *his own earning*, somehow. How about the new epic poem he is writing?"

The Knight gave a little shrill whistle of incredulity, which, to his astonishment, was echoed by another; and at the same minute there was a ring at the front bell, which brought Mr. Rennie from the rear.

The blood left Sir Hugh's cheeks very white for a moment or two, during which, without knowing exactly why, aunt Poynts' own alternated more, from pink to pale, than she could account for at the instant; and they sat looking at each other in the most curious way

imaginable, as if trying, for some anxious reason, to read each other's thoughts; till after a minute or two's altercation, with evidently more than one 'rough customer' on the mat, Mr. Rennie was constrained to present a very grave face, and to acquaint Sir Hugh that "he was wanted;" with a beseeching appeal to aunt Poynts, "not to leave, but, as my lady was from home, to wait a little while, to see if anything could be done for him."

At all events, aunt Poynts so interpreted it. And signifying to Rennie, "that she was in no hurry, and meant to have a biscuit and a glass of wine, before she continued her walk," Rennie's heart gave way; and hanging back half a moment, as Sir Hugh marched to his doom—"They're there," he said in a whisper; "the chaps, Miss, that have been hanging about all the morning; and if he'd only gone, as I wanted him, into the boudoir, he could have slipped away, out by the greenhouse, and been on Daredevil, and off, as easy as anything—and now, they've got him."

It was a novel position for Aunt Poynts to



be in, but that made it none the less interesting; and *acting* being at all times a more prominent feature in Eleanor Poynts's character, than *talking*, she made bold to step into the hall, and beg permission to have a private word or two, apart, with the captive. The result of which was,—after sundry emphatic denunciations from that much-injured individual, at the expense of the captors, together with his “determination, to go to a thousand prisons, before he would be a burden on his friends!”—Mr. Brockett's head clerk making his appearance, as soon as horse and man, could fetch him,—Miss Eleanor Poynts' guarantee was accepted—bail was taken—and Hugh Walcot was as free to go whithersoever he pleased that day, as his generous friend, just in the nick of time, Eleanor Poynts, herself was.

Rennie also had a private word or two to say to Sir Hugh. And when the Knight returned to thank his benefactress in the terms she deserved!—she was gone, having merely left a line on a card in an envelope, thus:—

“I shall drop in again to-morrow, if I can, and have it out with you about Clement; for now I hear he is daring to cast fond glances up at Yorke House, where my niece is. In short, I caught him in the fact on Saturday, and help me you must, or there is no knowing what will be the consequence.—E. P.”

“If that isn’t noble, I don’t know what is!” exclaimed Sir Hugh, fairly shedding a tear. “Just come down, or as good, with two hundred and sixty-eight pounds odd, and talks of being under an obligation to *me*—devilish handsome that!” and ordering Daredevil to be brought round in ten minutes; “Now then for a word with that atrocious villain, Swivel,” growled the set-free lion, going up-stairs. “Thought to cage me, eh?—and then,”—but the rest died away in his throat, for it was choking him; and every principle of honour, and love, and duty, and fidelity, and affection scouted the bare idea, as too ridiculous to dwell on. “She must have hoped to raise money on it,” he muttered to himself, as he snatched up his whip and gloves; “and wouldn’t tell me, for fear I

should make objections. Ah, it's my own fault! I ought to have told her, when I took it there before. What a hideous fool I have been! But, to think of that consummate villain!"—and Sir Hugh rang the bell hard—"that atrocious scoundrel!—after fleecing me as he has done—robbing me, with that crafty rascal Jenkins, through thick and thin, whenever they saw a chance, pillaging me at every turn—I see it now, as plain as the nose on my face—jeweling me out of every shilling they could lay their hands on,—ah!" to Rennie, "who has gone with Lady Walcot to-day?"

"Miss Maud, and Miss Gwynn, and Mark, Sir Hugh."

"Oh, and who went with her last time?"

"To Rexford?"

"Yes."

"Robert, Sir Hugh."

"Where is he?"

"Down-stairs."

"Send him up."

Enter Bob Acorn, as he was familiarly called by his peers.

"You went to Rexford with your mistress last week?"

"Yes, Sir Hugh."

"And put up at The Dolphin?"

"Yes, Sir Hugh."

"Before, or after you called in Water Street?"

"We—that's me and the ponies—didn't go nowhere, but to The Dolphin, Sir Hugh."

"Not to Water Street, at all?"

Bob looked down, to think before he got into a mess.

Sir Hugh repeated the question.

"No—not we, Sir Hugh."

"You, and Darby and Joan, you mean?"

"Yes, Sir Hugh."

"Oh, and how did you know, then, that Lady Walcot went there, if you were at The Dolphin?"

It was a random shot—many men do sometimes indulge in them—but it hit the mark; and taken by surprise:—

"I am sure," explained Bob, reddening like a May-duke cherry, "I knew nothing of

my Lady going there, till I saw her at the top of the street, as I came along by the bottom, and bought them three oranges I brought home for Mrs. Battles, as she'll tell you, Sir Hugh."

"Oh, and you were ready for Lady Walcot, I hope, when she wanted you? because, you know, I don't allow of loungings and loiterings about, when you put up anywhere. You remember the time they had to wait for you once before, at the fair?"

"Please, Sir Hugh, I was back, and the ponies all ready, more than half-an-hour before my Lady came in," said Bob, in his own vindication.

"That's right. You know Mr. Swivel's house, don't you?"

"The one with the dirty yellow door, that my Lady went in, with the name in black letters on it."

"Yes, by the bye, I sent you once there, with a letter, didn't I? Ah, very well, you'll know it again, then, next time:"—and off on Daredevil—how got on Lady Walcot and Maud and Miss Gwynn, at Madame Schultz's,

while burning with rage at "the atrocious villany of that infamous rascal ! who had tried to cage him that morning" the lion rampant was on his way, to wreck his fury on "the infamous author of his ruin !"

The hour or more that Lady Walcot had for her calls at Rexford before dropping in on Madame Schultz, to see the new fashions, brought her to Madame's show-room about a quarter before the time fixed by Mr. Swivel for deciding the fate of the settlement deed, whether it was worth anything to them or nothing, as a means of raising money, in their present pressing necessities. That Oliver Swivel knew very well, when she brought the deed to him, it was useless for the proposed purpose, of course, Lady Walcot was as yet unaware; as also of how desirous he had always been to get it into his possession, as an additional hold-fast on Sir Hugh, who was largely in his debt; and as the clocks pointed to five minutes to four, she remembered a purchase she had to make in the next street; and Maud

and Miss Gwynn having plenty to engage them, while she was away, with Madame's fresh importations from Paris and London,—as the hour struck:—

“Yes, my Lady,” smiled Mr. Mumbles, throwing wide the ‘pale yellow door.’ “Will your Ladyship have the kindness to take a seat for a moment?—Mr. Swivel will see you directly.”

This sounded like a successful issue to her errand, and, with beating heart, her Ladyship took the seat offered her, without once thinking of her pocket-handkerchief; though inwardly “thanking her stars! that she did not live in Water Street, if they never had any fresher air in it than that.”

Last time she was there, she had to bear it, with heaving chest, for more than half-an-hour; but now she had not gazed on the dark, dingy, dismal walls, and low-beamed smoke-coated ceiling, and thick, heavy framed windows, daubed with dirty yellow-white paint, five minutes, when the pleasing announcement came, that, “if her Ladyship would have

the kindness to follow him, Mr. Mansfield Mumbles would have the honor to escort her to the presence of his principal."

It has been notified elsewhere, that Mr. Swivel by no means lacked polish and tact enough, to know how to receive and behave himself to a lady; and, on the present occasion he had more motives than one for shining in his fair client's eyes. His belief was, that at the moment he was grasping her hand, and affectionately asking after Sir Hugh, the Knight was in the hands of the bailiffs, whose orders, he knew, were not to affect the arrest before Lady Walcot had left the house; and his aim was now, so to act, as "to make her feel, that, whoever else was her enemy at Yoxminster or elsewhere, Oliver Swivel was her trusty friend."

And, oddly enough, though she had come all the way from The Rookery to ask one question, which could have been put, as well as not, and answered in half a minute—no, there they continued talking for nearly half-an-hour on any subject but what, in truth,



both their thoughts were most upon ; till taking a deep breath :—

“ And how about what you were to tell me to-day ? ” ventured her Ladyship, pressing her hands tight together in her lap.

“ Ah, yes, about the Deed—true ”—and unlocking one of the drawers of his table, Swivel took it out, and spreading it open, ran his eye down it for the clause he wanted ; during which his fair client felt a little faint and sick, while the thought came over her, “ how true it was what Arnold Grey always said, ‘ That neither man, woman, nor child were ever the happier for having the Law, of man’s making, to go to, either in affluence or adversity ; however pride, and power, and the exigencies of sin and wickedness, for the sake of *justice*, might require it. ’ ”

“ There would have been no difficulty at all,” went on Mr. Swivel, as he continued his search for the place, “ but for rather an awkward—ah, yes, here it is—an exceedingly provoking clause here—amounting, I am afraid ”—and he laid the Deed on his knee—

“to,—and, unless in one way, I don’t see how we can get over it,—to an absolute bar to anticipation in any shape, as far as you —”

“Is that so?” caught up Lady Walcot, faintly, as the last plank, to which she had trusted, seemed to be slipping from her; while the sense of self-shame and mortification that she knew, by the burning of her face, was apparent to the keen eyes of the lawyer, by the peculiar look with which he accompanied this death-blow to her hopes, made her fancy for a moment or two “the room was going round with her, and that she must rush away, and hide herself from every one, and let the tears come, or her heart would burst.”

“Whether, in any way,” pursued Swivel, doubling up the Deed, and laying it in his drawer, “the thing could be done *privately*, as a matter of friendship, is another matter. I think it might, perhaps. Indeed, I believe I may go so far as to say I have a client, who, on my recommendation, would meet us to a certain extent. I don’t suppose he would do *all* we want him; but he might a part; I can’t

say exactly how much till I see him again ; it might be the whole, or not more than two-thirds—we must consider ourselves lucky, if we can get that. You see, it can only be done as between friends ; otherwise, you would place yourself in rather an awkward predicament. But we needn't talk of that now. My belief is, it may be arranged in the manner I mention ; and when does a man want a friend, a real friend in need, so much as when he is being torn almost to pieces by one or the other of them, I daresay, like poor Sir Hugh is ?”

A beautiful woman, with her eyes raised, full of grateful tears, in hopeful reliance on you, and you alone, is a touching sight, and it moved even Oliver Swivel.

“ You must have patience and courage for a day or two longer,” he added, in that kind, sympathetic tone, into which his voice could fall in an instant, if it pleased him, from its usual hard, cold key ; “ and I will see what I can do for you.”

“ Thank you !” and though her eyes were

full of tears, renewed hope glistened through them; and rising:—"Then," said Lady Walcot, looking towards the drawer in which it lay. "I suppose I may as well take the Deed with me now, and tell Sir Hugh what you say? Or would it be better to —"

"Leave it with me for a day or two longer, and say nothing to him about it at present? Most certainly! If we succeed, he will not be irreconcilable, I daresay. And, you know people won't lend their money, if you are not candid and aboveboard with them—probably my client may like to look it over."

"Very well. And when do you think I shall hear for certain?"

"Let me see—to-day's Tuesday," and Mr. Swivel changed colour a little, as heavy, hurried steps, in the passage, approached his door; "say Friday, by when I make no doubt at all—excuse me for a moment;"—and having exchanged a hasty word or two with Mumbles, "may I beg of you to step for two minutes into this room"—pushing back the folding doors that opened into the gallery, of which

mention was made in a former chapter, when Sir Hugh, and Messrs. Podge and Jenkins, held high festival therein,—and there was agitation in Oliver Swivel's manner, as he hurriedly led the way into the blue room, as it was called, from the cerulean tint of its hangings and chairs and couches; and seemed hardly to know what he was about, whether to shake hands, and call a servant from the house, to shew her ladyship out that way, or to "entreat her to take a seat and amuse herself for a little while, till he had seen and dismissed his importunate client in the office, and could return to her."

"I need not detain you any longer to-day that I know of," said Lady Walcot, walking on, to get away and out into the open air as fast as possible.

"Then I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again on Friday? Crouch—Crouch."

But Crouch not being within call at the moment:—

"Have the kindness to sit down for half a minute," begged Oliver, stepping back from

the hall into the gallery, "and I will send Mr. Mumbles to you immediately;" and hastening back to his room, there stood Mumbles, almost breathless with fright; till recalled to his senses by—"speak! speak!—what the hell do you stand shivering and shaking there for—where is he?"

"He's raving mad—he must be!" gasped Mumbles; "you never heard such thumps as he gave the door, enough to split it; but I wouldn't open it, any the more for that, and he's gone off, swearing at me a little bit."

"Which way?"

"Jacob didn't see—hark!"

"Eh—what—what—how do you mean—who the devil's that in the gallery? Damnation seize him! he has got in, through the house—curse the dolt-headed fools!—hark!—here he comes—stay—wait—he's like a raving mad bull, when his blood's up;" and running to a cabinet in the corner, Swivel unlocked it, and snatching up a revolver pistol from a drawer he pulled open, he thrust it under his waistcoat, and sitting down, off limped Mum-

bles—under pretence of going for Jacob, to keep a sharp look out, in case of a row—to his hat and stick, and a safe exit into the street; leaving his master to settle it with the ‘mad bull’ as best he might, either by force of reasoning, or force of whatever else might be necessary (that failing) to save his own bones from being broken.

Yes, Sir Hugh finding the ‘pale-yellow door’ proof against all assaults, tingled the house-bell so gently, spite of the boiling rage he was in, that Prudence, the house-maid, opened it, in Crouch’s absence, as unsuspiciously as if it had been for the baker or the milkman; and striding past her, as one specially privileged there, Lady Walcot’s surprise and confusion on seeing her husband rush into the private room where she was, and the Knight’s astounded look! at finding her, of all places on earth, alone in the Swivel gallery, must be left to the imagination of the reader.

It was a moment, that unlooked-for meeting of man and wife, in such a place, never to be forgotten while life lasts by either of them.

Staggered, Sir Hugh sprung back, as if he had encountered a sudden heavy blow from which he was reeling ; while Lady Walcot agitatedly awaited the burst of anger which she felt she deserved, for ever having, under any pretext, been induced to act in a manner so contrary to her principles, and which had thrown her into a position that might well arouse any husband's suspicions, who was as jealous-tempered as Sir Hugh, and who knew as well as he did the licentious character of the place she was in, and the immoral master of it.

Lady Walcot was the first to speak. The consciousness of unsullied motives could no longer brook those reproachful frowns and bitter looks with which, as she would have linked her arm in his, he scornfully drew himself away, and asked her, " If it were not a sweet room she was in ? and would she excuse his dropping in so inopportunistly and spoiling the *tête-à-tête* ?" —the which taking, at first for mere *badinage*, she held out both hands again, to draw him towards her, but he shook her off ; and knowing it was not the time then to



come to an explanation, "You will soon be after me, won't you?" she said, in a tone that startled him, from its sweet calmness; and leaving the room by the door at which he had rushed in on her,—“Now, then,” muttered Sir Hugh; and the next minute the ‘mad bull’ was face to face with his foe.

There was a mutual defiant scrutiny of each other's faces, without word or movement on either side, while you might have counted twenty, as the clock ticks. Sir Hugh had won his Knighthood by his bravery in action, and though a consummate villain in his way, Oliver Swivel was no coward. So far, they were well matched; and what the subtle man of law wanted of the Knight's larger frame, was amply made up to him by his superior cunning and coolness and agility, when pinned in a corner.

The measurement of each other over:

“I suppose you know what I am come for?” began Sir Hugh, keeping his eyes fixed on his adversary's face; “though you hardly expected me to-day?”

“To make a very unseemly exhibition of yourself, I think,” returned Swivel; “a pretty return to my door-panels, for having been opened to you so often in your need.”

“Ah, and why were they shut against me now?”

“Do you open your doors to—”

“Pray go on—I shall have my turn.”

“I was going to say, to mad-bulls?”

Sir Hugh laid his clenched fist on the table, and leaning a little forward, so as to be the more distinctly heard:—“I have opened them,” he replied, “to the biggest villain! the blackest scoundrel! the basest rascal! that walks the earth—Oliver Swivel by name, attorney at law, of Water Street, Rexford—that’s worse, isn’t it?”

“If I could have lent you the money you want, to pay your debts,” sneered Swivel, “I suppose the ‘basest rascal’ would have been a very good fellow?”

“Offer it me now—you can if you like—and the thousands you have robbed me of,—and see what I will call you then?”

"Robbed you of?"

"Swindled me out of, if you prefer it—perhaps that is more in your line?"

"Frantic men will talk folly."

"Rogues and knaves take no affronts."

"Not at the hands of fools and madmen."

"Ha! what's that?" pointing to the deed in the half-open drawer, "what fresh theft have you got there?"

"Ask your Lady," with a triumphant curl of the lip.

"Give it me—make haste."

"Is that the way to get it, do you think?" smiled Swivel, shutting the drawer.

"Oh, going to lock it up, are you?" roared the 'mad Bull,' rushing at the bunch of keys in the money-lender's hand; but the knave was too nimble for him; and having made good his safe deposit of the keys in his pocket, "You are a pretty sort of—what shall I call you?" said Swivel, derisively imitating the Knight's tone and manner—"gentleman's out of the question—a nice sort of a swell of a gent, to come into a man's house in this way,

and behave more like a drunken bully, a great deal, than a —”

But the sentence was cut short by so sudden and sharp a blow with the Knight's right fist in the face of the bill-discounter, that it sent him backwards over his arm-chair ; but only till he could get up again, when springing to his feet, he flew at his assailant like a tiger ; and a grapple ensuing between them, for a little while it seemed doubtful whether the tougher nerve of the smaller man would not be more than a match for the superior height and breadth of the larger ; till vehemently grasping his neckcloth, the Knight drove his adversary against the wall, and there held him, half strangled, for as long as Swivel, having got an arm free, was extricating the pistol from the folds of his waistcoat ; when click went the trigger, and back went Sir Hugh, stunned with the blow of the bullet, which passing through his coat collar, tore up the flesh of his cheek, and having carried away part of his upper-lip, buried itself in the bookshelves. But the sight of the blood he had

shed did not suffice Swivel ; for, as Sir Hugh, rousing himself from the first effects of the shot, made a rush for the poker—bang went another barrel, this time so hastily aimed, as only to graze the ends of his neck-tie ; and before another barrel could be brought into play, up went the poker, and down again, with such tremendous intention ; on Oliver's head, that had he had fifty loaded barrels more, all ready, and fifty fingers to pull them with—there they would have lain powerless to do any more mischief in the world, as far as Oliver Swivel could use them, with a fractured skull, and not twenty-four hours more left him on earth, to make his peace with heaven.

And the deed done, beyond the power of recall,—and such contests obtain but little sympathy for the conquerors,—Sir Hugh, covered with his own gore, threw wide the street door, and showed himself to the world, and asked them to “ come in and see with their own eyes what he had done ? and what had been done to him ? and then to decide whether he was to be hanged for it or not, according

to law?" And in limped old Mumbles, with the police; and bent over the body of his master; and put his snuffy pocket-handkerchief to his old eyes; and was deeply afflicted! So much so, when Crouch came in from the house, to say "the Doctor gave no hopes," that if it had not been for a stiff glass a-piece of gin and water that Jacob made them in the little back room that Lady Walcot said smelt so bad, there is no saying whether his old grey hairs would ever have got over it, he was "cut up so!"

"There was one comfort for them, they had got the murderer—and now let him give them the slip again, if he could!" which being precisely the sentiments of Mr. Crouch and Jacob Grill—the little back-room, of the 'bad smells,' quite rang again with their virtuous wrath!

Poor Lady Walcot, waiting anxiously at home, with Maud and Clement, in the library, for the joyful sounds of Daredevil's canter up the drive, how little thought she that the next tidings of her loving lord, would be that he was in the hands of justice; and there would

remain, at all events, till the result of the coroner's inquest was known, if it turned out that the doctors were right in their opinion, that "Oliver Swivel would be dead before morning."

## CHAPTER XIII.

TELLS THE READER WHAT 'PLAGUED RALPH  
MORE THAN ANYTHING HE HAD EVER DONE  
IN HIS LIFE.'

UNFORTUNATELY for the clean breast that Ralph said he would make of it, at the Parsonage, 'before he put bread again into his mouth,' the Vicar was out for the day, and Mrs. Bonney did not expect him home till late. But Mr. Roland Yorke was walking on the lawn with Miss Gray, when he came up the gravel path ; and hailing him, the three soon got into pleasant conversation.



"Yes," said Roland, "I saw you and Betsy in the churchyard this afternoon."

"We did not see you," returned Ralph.

"I took care that you should not. It was a scene that I felt at liberty to witness, unobserved."

Ralph's eyes glistened!

"Well, now you want a head and foot stone, with a proper inscription?"

Ralph looked at Miss Grey, enough to say—

"Yes, you know, Miss, don't you, how happy that would make Betsy?"

"And," went on Roland, "the banns will be published next Sunday?"

Ralph looked down.

"I understood Betsy to say so."

"It depends," muttered Ralph, hesitatingly.

Mary Gray started!

"On what?" asked Roland, gravely.

"Whether something I've got to tell the Vicar, first, will make any odds."

"Make any odds!" repeated Mary, "what do you mean?"

"Only, that I must tell the Vicar something, first."

"Oh, and did you come for that purpose now?" asked Roland, musingly.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, the Vicar's not at home; but you can see him to-morrow morning."

Ralph looked disconcerted.

"Do you want to see him to day?" enquired Mary.

"I'd have liked, if I could anyhow, Miss."

"Then you may, if you will come again later—before he goes to bed."

"Thank you, Miss. Then I will, please, Miss, come any time, Miss, if it's not troubling you," and Ralph looked up again, evidently with some of the load off his mind.

"And you are going to draw in some gravel out of the pit to-morrow for Mr. Brockett, I hear?" smiled Roland.

"Yes, twelve loads, Mr. Grix was saying."

"Well, that will be a nice job, won't it? and

get your hand in for smartening me up a bit, when you have done it ? Ever so much better that, eh, Ralph, than hanging about idle ? ”

“ A main sight ! I believe you, sir.” But still there was a drawback somehow. Ralph was not as cheerful as he ought to have been, having turned his back on the past, and with so many present kind friends round him, and such bright prospects a-head ! and he wished Mr. Roland and Miss Mary good afternoon in so thoughtful a key, that :—

“ There’s something on Ralph’s mind, troubling him more than we know of,” said Mary, as soon as he was out of the gate ; “ and I shall be very glad when papa comes to the bottom of it.”

“ Whatever it may be,” agreed Roland, “ the sooner it’s off the better ; and he seems to think so, to judge by his anxiety about it. Did you notice how white he turned when we talked of the banns ? ”

“ I expect that was more from the fear of something happening to forbid them, than anything else.”

"Very likely. I believe he loves her."

"So do I; and so does papa, too, and you know he looks deep?"

"Yes; and his behaviour in the churchyard was very pleasing, and very genuine I thought. The Rector wished us joy, this morning, of our 'Refuge For Ruffians,' as he calls it."

"And what did you say?"

"Facts are stubborn things."

"Oh, and he laughed, I suppose?"

"Yes, and asked me 'where they were?'"

"Calls him a reprobate still, then?"

"Not exactly; but has no objection to Millford owning him, rather than Lyn-court."

"All the same, he wishes us well?" smiled Mary, "that's a comfort! And about Betsy?"

"You should have heard the cry of pain he gave, when I mentioned her. 'No, no! he wouldn't hear a word—evil communications corrupt good manners—Eliza Peach had gone astray now, and that was only because they did not get rid of Betsy Bond

soon enough—not a girl who misbehaved herself should remain in a cottage of his—out with them as soon as they fell off from the fold—they were none of his !”

“ And, pray, what did your reverence answer ? as Clement would say.”

“ Nothing. Only thought all the more, of what would become of them, if everybody else said the same. But now I want to talk to you about something else, something particularly appertaining to myself.”

“ How very *uninteresting* !”

“ You know that my brother has sent for Brockett, to make his will ? ”

“ Yes, you told me.”

“ And that he means to cut me and Mabel off, without a shilling, unless we will drop all further acquaintance with the Walcots ? ”

“ So you were saying yesterday. But Mr. Brockett has hopes, papa heard, that he will think better of it, and never do anything so abominably wicked ! I admire Mabel’s spirit ! ”

“ Ah, for sticking to Clement so ? Well,

it does show a true heart. Mabel Yorke all over.' Faith! as well try to move the mountains, as Mabel, when she has conscientiously made up her mind."

"What a fortunate thing for her, in this instance, that she has her brother Roland's sanction—it must make the loss of the Three Hundred Thousand a mere *bagatelle*?"

"Ah, yes,—but how about poor Roland himself, and the like little sum that he magnanimously foregoes for her sake?"

"Poor Roland! do you say?"

"What do you call an ambitious soul like his is, then, on Ninety Pounds per annum?"

"Till the Bishop give it a lift, do you mean? which good, kind, dear Mr. Bliss, his chaplain, whispered to me the other day, he 'certainly would do, before long;'—well, decidedly not as rich as he will be some day, when he puts on lawn-sleeves; but better off a wee bit than some poor curates I could mention, with not a farthing more than Seventy Pounds a-year—some of them not that,—yes, and married, too, and with a lot

of little ones to feed, and clothe, and provide for."

"Which encourages me to ask something else," smiled Roland, as they entered the fir-walk,—“your father's stipend was no more than mine is, when he was married?"

"The same exactly."

"And he took pupils, and made it do, and was very happy?"

"With such a loving, industrious, frugal, painstaking, exemplary helpmate as my dear mother was to him, how could it be otherwise?"

"Without whom, his little means would not have gone half as far?"

"So he always says; and who ought to know better?"

"Who, indeed!"

"Yes—with but Ninety Pounds a-year, stipend," resumed Mary, after a mutual silence of half a minute, "and what else his talents earned him—as happy as happy could be!"

"And not a wish beyond?"

"Not one, that I ever heard of, but what

made him happier and happier, the more he indulged them !”

“ Ah—and Mary Grey is the image of her mother ?”

“ Who told you such a——”

“ Her father.”

“ He must have been somewhat blinded by his love ?”

“ He was very grave, when he said it.”

“ It might have twinged his conscience a little, to tell such a fib ?”

“ No, he never winked once.”

“ And you believed him ?”

“ Yes—and made up my mind from that moment, to—what do you think ?”

“ How is it possible I can guess ?”

“ Then I will tell you—only don’t look down so, or I shan’t have courage—cut off without a shilling as I am.—Mary, look *at* me—yes, *now* I can speak—from that moment I made up my mind to ask you, the first chance I had, whether, as your mother was contented to marry a poor curate on Ninety Pounds a-year, you, being her image in everything, could be



prevailed on to do likewise?" and there was a slight tremulousness of the voice, as he spoke, which Mary liked quite as much as the words themselves, which were very plain spoken, and would hardly have satisfied some young ladies who had read the thrilling things! said by the majority of lovers, when they made offers, in novels.

"Perhaps I might," answered Mary, colouring, "if I had as good reason as my dear mother had for so-doing."

"You mean, if the poor fellow who raised his eyes to you, were another Arnold Grey, or something like him?"

"What a wonderful conjuror you are!"

"Ah, then, I've got you!—for who was it you yourself told me, the other day, was more like him in mind and manners than any one else you ever knew?"—and grasping both her hands;—"am I to take that as *yes* to my question?"

"Question?—what question?"

"Oh, that tiresome, tormenting, dear, duplex little nature!—must I repeat it? Mary

Grey, will you be mine? will you come and beautify and bless my humble home? will you be my wife? my own Mary? my all in all? and make my little means go, with your loving, industrious, frugal, painstaking, exemplary care, as far again as they do now? If you will, all I can say is, I will be unto you another Arnold Grey, as far as I can—more than which I cannot, will not promise you.”

“Be to me *yourself*,” blushed Mary,—meeting his, *will* you? with as absolute a *yes*! as there was any necessity for,—“and I shall be contented. But there is one thing I must take leave to ask, before they set it about that Mary Grey is to be Mrs. Roland Yorke—pray how was it that you liked Annie Walcott so much better than you did me, for a long time?”

“Did I?—who says so?”

“Everyone.”

“But myself—I ought to know best.”

“Oh! for I can’t tell how long you paid her so much attention, I hardly got a smile sometimes, even by accident—you know it’s true?”

"I know," smiled Roland, "*who* took all the pains she could to tease and torment me so, with that 'dear, duplex little nature' of hers, that if I had not had the patience of Job, poor Gabriel Gracechurch would not have been as happy as he is. But that's all over now, isn't it?" and passing an arm round her waist, as they came under a little alcove of first:—"How am I to know you are not bearing me malice for it at this moment, spite of those smiles? what pledge have I, that, with that 'April-day face,' you won't change your mind, and go and marry somebody who would make you a Bishop's lady in half the time I shall? can you think of any mode to convince me? Well, whether strictly clerical or, not, at this time of day, I don't know, and don't care, but pledge I must have!"—and then and there ensued a mutual ratification of treaties, that, presently, brought them out again on the lawn so smiling and happy! that not even Annie herself, the emblem of content, arm in arm, with her handsome Gabriel, on their little parish missions of duty and benevolence, talking

of the wedded joys in store for them, as soon as the necessary preliminaries were all completed,—was a prouder and happier woman, (though with an intended settlement on her of Three Hundred a-year, by Lady Gracechurch's munificence) than was Mary Grey, with her noble Roland, and his curacy of Ninety Pounds per annum, and her own little fortune, from her mother, of Fifteen Hundred Pounds,—telling Mrs. Bonney of her “unspeakable joy! and what sort of dress and cap she meant to give her on her wedding day.”

And the evening came. But Mary had not said one-quarter of what her heart was fullest of to Mrs. Bonney; and they sat chatting till the clocks struck ten, when every minute might bring papa home, to hear, from her lips, what well she knew would delight him more than any earthly tidings she could tell him of himself. And as he stood dismantling himself of his upper coat in the hall, her impatience to make him as happy as herself could no longer be restrained, and bidding him put his head down, she wound both her arms round his

neck, and whispered something in his ear. And he pressed her to his breast, and kissed her fondly; and went into the little study, where the fire was burning bright, with the lamp on the tale; when she saw, instead of joy, big tears in his eyes! which filling her own, she looked up at him thoughtfully for a moment; and then again winding her arms round him, let her head fall on his shoulder, and sobbed aloud!

What was there to sob about? Mary's heart knew. Yes, and so did her father's. And clasped in each other's arms, they had their cry out; nor minded Bonney's presence a pin, as she bustled about, to get the Vicar a cup of tea, after his ride; but let their bosoms have full vent. When—the first thoughts of separation yielding to brighter themes—and, oh, what a happy evening it ought to have been to them, thus blessed by Heaven!—Ralph, with a long face, asked permission to have speech of the Vicar for a few minutes? And then Mary called to mind her promise to him that afternoon; and bidding him go into the study, the Vicar shook

him by the hand; and pointing to a chair facing him, Ralph sat down, and thus opened the purport of his visit, after the usual friendly greetings:—

“It’s what I wanted to tell your reverence when I was in there,” said Ralph, flushing a little, “that I’ve come for now?”

The Vicar listened.

“I told Betsy, by the gate, I wouldn’t taste food no more till I’d spoken to you, and cleared myself, come what would of it.”

“You did right, if you have anything on your mind that troubles you. When was it you said that to Betsy?”

“Just before I came up and saw Mr. Roland and Miss Grey, after we’d been to—to look at the grave.”

“Your child’s?”

Ralph nodded.

“That was well. Go on.”

“Well, then,” said Ralph, turning ghastly white, as he drove his hand down into his breast-pocket;—“it’s this,—” drawing out a small coarse canvas bag, tied round with a piece of

whip-cord—"has plagued me more than anything I ever did in my life."

The Vicar rested his chin on his hand, and looked curiously at the dirty bag-full of something that Ralph placed on the table.

"It's never let me have a moment's rest."

"What, that bag there? how do you mean?"

Ralph untied the cord; and shaking the bag, with its mouth downwards, out fell a roll of greasy old County Bank Notes, close to the Vicar's elbow.

"That's every farthing of 'em I found—just as I dropped on 'em in the pit—or may God——"

"Hush! what has He to do with it? except to bring to light the things of darkness in His own way, Ralph, and at His own time and pleasure? Go on."

"Well, then, this is how it was," and Ralph rested his brawny fist on the table, and looked the Vicar straight in the face.

"That's right!" encouraged Arnold Grey;  
"worth a hundred of all your oaths and ap-

peals to Him, which confirm nothing but a man's doubt of himself. Go on."

"You know, your reverence, I said I'd be sworn I saw somebody coming out of Holly Copse, the night the old man was murdered?"

"At Yorke House?"

"The old gentleman, yes, Mr. Roland Yorke. Well, I'd been drinking, so I won't say for sure. But if it wasn't—" and Ralph sunk his voice to almost a whisper—"if it wasn't Mr. Joel Yorke, it was his ghost, or I was drunk, that's all."

"So you said before. You were tipsy, most likely?"

"How could that be, your reverence, and I hadn't drank three quarts?"

"Well."

"So I thought I'd just come round there again, after a bit, and keep a look out. And so I did every night, for a month near, till they said it was a ghost, some of 'em, and then I was obliged to give over; till one night I was coming along the hollow there, at the top of the lane, when somebody got into the



copse, through the gap, by the pea field, just as I crossed the bottom; and I went round to the corner, and crept on, till I saw him—a middle-sized sort of man, in a yellow smock and a coal-heaver's sort of hat over his eyes—go right on for the gravel pit; but I couldn't see him no more; and I didn't want to go on then, as it was no business of mine, and so I went back to bed, and thought no more of it, till I heard of the money that was missing the night of the murder; and then I thought I'd have another look out; and so I said nothing to nobody, but went and looked round and about, and down into the pit; and there was a hole like at the bottom, two foot and more deep that wasn't done long; and, after a bit, I got the grit and dirt up at the top, and hooked *them* up, too, just as you see 'em there, all loose; and then I put 'em in that old bag, and took 'em out with me to Auckland; and there they've been ever since, though I've been hard druv many a time; but they seemed to burn my fingers whenever I touched 'em; and so, thank Almighty God! there they are

every farthing, just as I dropped on 'em ; and that's all I know of it, if it's the last word more I ever have to speak ! It was Two Hundred and Forty Pounds, wasn't it, was missing, when the old gentleman came by his death ?”

“ Yes, I believe that was the sum.”

“ All in notes, too, your reverence—no gold ?”

“ True.”

“ Well, there it is then, just right, and his name on 'em, too—no mistake about that.”

“ Whose ?”

“ Roland Yorke's. Look !”

“ No,”—and the Vicar's troubled brow, as he leant back in his chair and glanced, first, at the money, then at Ralph, and then at the horrible thoughts that flashed across him ! sent the blood out of Ralph's face so, that, to have looked at him at the moment, a casual observer would have said, ‘ there's guilt in that fellow's livid cheeks and lips, he can't disguise it.’ But the Vicar had narrowly scanned him, while he was telling his tale ; and believing

what he said to be the truth, it was a little while before he could command himself sufficiently to go on with what he had to say, in answer to Ralph's wish, that he would examine the notes, when—"No," he repeated; "what I may personally think about it, is of no consequence, Ralph, except so far as you may be anxious to know whether I believe what you have just told me or not. I do believe it."

Ralph heaved a deep breath!

"I do—but that is not enough for you now. My opinion, one way or the other, will not clear or condemn you. You must go, money and all, before a higher tribunal, and see how you can clear yourself there."

Ralph winced.

"Ah, you see now the value of a good character? Appearances are against you. It looks very ugly to have a murdered man's missing money in your possession. What would you give now, to be above suspicion? Why did you touch it? You knew it was not yours?"

"Because everybody was against me, as

you may say, and I didn't mind what I did."

"Oh, was that it? And did you see the face of the man in the smock-frock and coal-heaver's hat?"

"Only just for a moment like, as he turned his head to look round, as he went through the gap in the hedge, by the pea-field; but I couldn't make him out any."

"Couldn't distinguish any of his features, or what sort of figure he had, whether thin or stout?"

"Only his nose."

"Oh, and what sort of a nose was it?"

"Well, I couldn't see hardly, the moon went in and out so; but it wasn't unlike the nose of him they've got up on the top there of High Street, they call King John."

"Ah, like King John's nose, was it? And how was it, driven hard as you were, you never used any of the money?"

Ralph looked down.

"Shall I tell you why? Because, like a coward, you thought you would be traced, if

you did, and perhaps hanged for the murder. If it had been in gold, how then?"

"Thank Almighty God! it wasn't."

"Well, that's best, to own it. And what did you mean to do with it, if you had not been lugged up again and thrown in there, and, so, we had never met?"

Ralph's brow darkened.

"I'll answer you that, too—to keep it—eh—in hopes of turning it to account—eh—you best know how? Ralph, Ralph, what a hideous gulf it has pleased Heaven to save you from!"

Tears rolled down the 'reprobate's' cheeks.

"Ah! well you may weep—tears of joy, arn't they? Of gratitude and thanksgiving, for being brought to shed them here, at this moment, as you are doing? I tell you, man,"—and the Vicar rose and grasped him by the arm—"one tear, such as I hope and believe those are, will weigh more for you than all the golden gifts you could bring to His altar, if you had all the wealth of the Yorkes in your pockets. But I won't deceive you—

this fact of your having the missing money of a murdered man in your possession, is an ugly business, and will bring you into the hands of justice again. Go back home now, and good night to you! Leave the wretched bits of greasy old bank paper there; and go and fall on your knees and thank the merciful power that has brought them back, so far untouched, on that table there. But one word more—what made you bring them to me, at the risk of going to gaol again, when, by throwing them into the fire, there would have been an end of them, and of all danger to yourself, too?”

“Because,” said Ralph, meeting the Vicar’s searching eye with a look of simple truthfulness that spoke for itself; “because that wouldn’t have been clearing myself *where* I want to be clear; and I’d sworn to God, I’d never take the girl to the altar, with that on my hands.”

“It will be my duty the first thing to-morrow, to make known to the magistrates what has passed between us to-night,” said

the Vicar, at the door. "You will be in custody most likely before I see you again. For that you are prepared. Good night! Come what may, you have taken the right course—that is always a comfort and great help to us, Ralph, in times of trouble."

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE ACCUSING SPIRIT.

It had been a day of events both at Rexford and Yoxminster; and Mr. Brockett came late to Yorke House, though fagged almost to death, to acquaint them with the news just brought in, of the tragical encounter between Sir Hugh and Mr. Swivel, 'which had laid the lawyer on his death bed, and thrown his client into the hands of the police.'

Joel Yorke was walking about his room when Brockett ran upstairs with the terrible intelligence, that 'Mr. Swivel was not ex-



pected to live twelve hours, and that Sir Hugh would be indicted for the murder.'

A ghastly smile played round Joel's mouth as he stood listening and gnawing his thumb-nail, evidently gloating over the fall of his enemy; and it was not till Brockett's hand was on the door handle, to be off again, that he remembered what he wanted to ask him, 'about the result of the railway meeting that day at the Town Hall? and whether they could go through his property in Holly Lane, if he stood out against it?'—The answers to both which questions being, 'that it was definitely determined to carry the line through Holly Copse, and across the lane to Millford Mead, and so on to Lyncourt, &c., &c., and that no opposition could be made to it by owners of property there, if fairly compensated—' Joel's jaw fell; and commencing again at his thumb, Brockett's late dinner was waiting, and he was famishing! and, so, Mr. Yorke must think it over, and decide on the compensation he wanted for it, by the next time he saw him."

And left alone, Joel paced his room from end to end; till feeling faint, as the perspiration stood in thick drops on his forehead, he rang the bell, to know "what time it was?" and to say "he was hungry, and would have his supper, and go to bed, and try and get some sleep."

"Won't you see Mr. Roland, first?" asked Nanny.

"Where is he?"

"In the back parlour, with Miss Mabel."

"The back parlour?" repeated Mr. Yorke, clutching the chair back.

"Yes, looking at—at the picture. They've been there this hour."

"No—not to night—I can't talk—that's enough—I won't see any one—he's not dead yet, is he?"

"Dead?" and Nanny turned as white as a sheet—"who?"

"Mr. Swivel—havn't you heard?"

Nanny breathed again! "Oh, he—no, poor man, but they say his head's crushed

in so with the poker, that you can see his brains."

Mr. Yorke turned towards the window:—

"What sort of a night is it?"

"Bitter cold! Shall I bring up a handful more wood?"

"No—what's on will do—go and get me my supper."

Nanny put her head in at the door, as she passed the parlour, on her way to the kitchen—

"Mr. Yorke's tired and wants his supper, and then he's going to bed," she said; "and he won't see any one."

"You must try and get him to let you read to him to-morrow," sighed Mabel, linking her arm in Roland's, as he took up his hat. "It seemed to comfort him last time."

"I thought so, too; though it's difficult to be quite sure what pleases Joel, and what don't. He has said nothing more, then, since the morning, about the will?"

"Not a word. His whole thoughts are

now seemingly taken up with this new railway line through Holly Lane. Nanny says he has been muttering to himself and grumbling about it all day."

"How strange? and there's no part of his property he need care less for than that. It pays him scarcely anything; and how can it, suffering it to run to waste as he does? Look at the Copse—he won't have a faggot cut; and as to his ever building a mill there, as he talks of sometimes, where's the head of water to come from, when he has done it? and in summer the stream's dried up so, you can see the bottom of it. It seems such folly, to be so touchy and tenacious about that waste land, for it's little better, Grix says. See the fuss he made, when I offered him, like a booby—I was out of temper for a moment—you know how much for it? And now, there he is worrying himself about it, Brockett says, as if he were going to give it to them, instead of netting double what it's worth. I often think he must be a little mad on some points, and that's one of them. Think how he let Martha's cottage

nearly tumble down, before Grix could persuade him to lay out sixpence on it, and yet he don't mind what he expends on his other places. Don't you call it very strange? I'll be bound, this fearful affair of Sir Hugh's, much as he hates him, don't trouble him half so much as their carrying their line through Holly Croft. Well for Martha, isn't it, they won't turn her out, too?"

But Mabel's thoughts were taken up with other matters just then, more interesting to her a great deal than Joel's unreasonable anger with the new railway company; and the clocks had struck twelve, before they had done talking of Oliver Swivel, and Sir Hugh, and the dreadful affliction they must be in at the Rookery! and how it would affect Annie's engagement with Mr. Gracechurch?—and then of what the Vicar would say, when Mary told him whose 'little wife of wives' she had that afternoon promised to be—whether he would jump for joy, or, pulling a grave face, ask her, "how she could ever have the heart to think for one moment he would

part with her ?" — and, then, naturally enough of "what Clement was about? that she had not seen him or his ghost all day—though she had kept Nelly for more than two hours, up and down, till, poor old soul! she was quite worn out with it."—When Roland "making sure that Clement would be able to explain it all satisfactorily by and bye; and that sending off *The New Epic* to Pater-noster Row had very likely had something to do with it," they exchanged good night adieus! And finding from Nanny that Joel had been in bed since ten, and wanted nothing more then, Mabel went to such rest as was in store for her in the dull old room over the back parlour, wherein the rats were at their games, as usual—fully resolved, that "now Joel was so much better, she would make her escape to Aunt Poynts, away from the grim ghostly old house, as soon as she could do so with any grace; for to remain any longer shut up there, with only Nanny and Nelly to talk to—unless some one came and took pity on her for an

hour—was impossible! now they were in such dreadful affliction at The Rookery, and dear Mary, too, would be wanting to tell her so many things about herself;—” with which last soothing reflection dropping off into a sweet slumber—one struck—then two,—and still she slept on, notwithstanding her riotous neighbours underneath; when startled by an unusual noise on the landing, near her door, she sat up, and throwing back her hair from her ears, listened, with beating heart, to the cautious tread of feet, as if without shoes, going down-stairs. “Was she awake? or dreaming? Hark—what was that?—like a bolt drawn back, or the letting down of an iron bar?—there again—she could not be mistaken,—some one below was either fastening up, or unfastening a door or window—what should she do?” and she was about to spring from the bed, and go and tell Nanny, when it occurred to her, “how Joel had walked once before in his sleep, and gone down stairs, and examined the doors and windows, when Roland was there, and would no doubt have gone up

again, without any harm happening, if he had not been woke as he was, which was always much best avoided with sleep-walkers, they said ;” and breathing freer, she lay down again, expecting to hear him return when he had gone his rounds ; and so certain did she feel that she was right in her conjectures, that giving way to the drowsiness that stole over her, she fell into a deep sound forgetfulness of everything, but what her Rookery-dreams were busiest with, and so slept on till morning :

Nanny was always the first up in Yorke House ; and reckoning, that, as Mr. Yorke had only a basin of onion-porridge and a thim slice of bread and butter for his supper, he would be wanting his breakfast early, she was up and at his door as the clock struck half-past six ; when thinking a moment :—  
“ Best not wake him, if he’s asleep,” she said to herself, “ a nice long rest always does him so much good ;” and putting her ear closer, to be sure,—“ yes, I’ll go down, first, and light the fire, and put the kettle on, all ready for



Nelly; then he can have his breakfast the moment he rings for it."

And soon there was a nice bright blaze, and the kettle was beginning to hum, and Nelly would be coming now in a few minutes; and having so far expedited matters, in case her master felt faint, as he usually did when he first woke of the morning, up Nanny went again to him. But Miss Mabel was before her, for anxious to see how Joel was, after his night-walk, she slipped out of her room, half-dressed, into his, as Nanny's foot was on the first stair, and not finding him there, concluded he had gone down, and was hurrying back, to be quick after him, when—"Have you been in to him?" asked Nanny, eagerly. "I thought I'd let him sleep as long as he could, and go and get the kettle on, by the time Nelly came; and she's to bring you in a new-laid egg for your breakfast, for you'll get quite thin, if you don't eat more than you do."

"No, Nanny, he is not in his room—I was so surprised—havn't you seen him?—he

must have gone down, surely, without my hearing him?"

"What?" gasped Nanny, "not in his room?" and rushing into it,—sure, there was the bed, with the clothes thrown back, just as Mr. Yorke had got out of it—but "where—where was her master?"—and, dumb-struck, Nanny stood for half-a-minute with clenched hands as if dizzied by a sudden blow that staggered her! when seemingly impelled by some terrible thought that struck her, off she tore from place to place, till she had searched every corner of the house from the sky-lofts to the cellars; while Mabel, calling to mind the muffled footsteps on the landing, could hardly still the beatings of her heart, with the awful feelings that came over her; mixed up as they were with the frightful visions of Clement and Joel, somehow and somewhere, as she had been dreaming of them, "engaged in deadly conflict with each other, out of revenge on Joel's part, for his loss of Annie, and the maddening insults he had received from her father;"—but no—Joel Yorke was nowhere to

be found. Still, Nanny was "sure he *must* be somewhere about the premises, or at the counting-house, or down at wharf-side;" and rushing from one to the other, from whom she thought she might hear tidings of him—no—Geoffrey Drayton was no less bewildered than herself—not a soul had seen him—"perhaps he had wandered along the river-side, and, in a fit of absence, fallen in and was drowned;" and Nanny was starting off again, like a wild woman, to the water,—when, "Stop—stop," cried Nelly, as well as she could articulate, and drag her trembling old knees along up to the back-door, with the fright she was in,— "Oh, my God! my God!—they've found him—Ralph Andrews and Mr. Grix—so they say—down in the gravel-pit there, in Holly Copse—on his face, dead—stiff—and stone-cold—with a great hammer in his hand—and dressed in a large flap-hat, and dirty yellow smock-frock," and falling back into Nanny's arms, Nelly fainted away.

Reader, you can picture to yourself, if you please—for what pen could truthfully des-

cribe them—the heart-rending scenes that followed at Yorke House ! They are too dreadful to dwell on, too horrible for healthy contemplation. It may be left to your imagination also, to conceive the faces in the good old town of Yoxminster and its vicinity, when the first dread rumours in the wind, from Milford, came howling in, with such terrific blasts to back them ! that bad and good together stood aghast, with bated breath, wondering to what pitch of wickedness, as Arnold Grey often said, the world was coming, with all its wisdom ? And pale men and women, at variance, but five minutes before, clustered round each other in knots, with looks so terror-stricken, that their little ones crept into corners by themselves, and dared not speak ; but tremblingly listened, like their elders, for every fresh detail of horror with a shuddering zest ! as if, tell them what you would, it was not enough, —not even blood itself, to overflow, would slake their morbid thirst for it.

Need we care, if we could, to paint such scenes as these ? But before dropping the

curtain, we have a word or two to say on some other matters, material to the clear understanding of how it was Joel Yorke was found by Ralph and Mr. Grix in the gravel-pit? at all events, to state what the general belief was on the subject; as also what people said about the return of the missing money to the Vicar, by Ralph, the night before Joel Yorke's self-conviction as his father's murderer, was, by his own act and deed, sufficiently made manifest to the world, to leave no doubt on the mind of any man, woman, or child, that *his* was the hand, and *his* alone, by which the old man fell. Nor, because the chief villain of the drama has left the stage, are we to feel any the less interest about those worthy folks who came round and kept him company, in the innocence of their hearts, knowing nothing of the indelible blood stains in his hands that he himself was always looking at. Nay, now we know the truth, we feel all the more delight in drawing round, with them, into a common circle, and comparing notes, and profiting by any suggestions one can offer the other; for thus

it is we pick up knowledge, and, if we turn it to account, grow wiser therefrom; and come to the conviction, as we acknowledge 'How Inscrutable Are The Ways Of God!—how miserably dark, and deceitful, and full of danger are man's ways, with all his lights, without His prevading Eye ever in, and about, and over them, to bring one and all out, in His good time, to the full comprehension of His Love for them all.'

And many there were who stopped the Vicar, to ask him, "How it was that Joel Yorke left his bed in the dead of the night, to go to the gravel pit?" And to one and all he made the same answer to "what drew him there, we wonder?" "The Accusing Spirit within him—THE EYE OF GOD!"

## CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH ARNOLD GREY SATISFACTORILY EXPLAINS WHAT WOULD, OTHERWISE, BE 'INCREDIBLE' TO AUNT POYNTE, AND BRINGS THE STORY TO A CONCLUSION.

NOT a reader of this story but must have known, from its commencement, that Joel Yorke's was the assassin's hand that struck down his father, while counting out his money in the back-parlour, on the hapless evening to Yorke House specially spoken of in the first chapter. I, as the story-teller, have made no attempt to disguise it. On the contrary, my wish has been that every reader of the terrible Eye that haunted him night and day

to the last, the terrible Voice that kept ever dinning in his ears, 'Joel Yorke! Joel Yorke! there is one thing that gold will *not* buy!' should see, as well as myself, the condign end to which The Accusing Spirit was gradually bringing the murderer, by his own act and deed. And I humbly ask—when he was found in the gravel-pit, in which he must have buried the hammer with which he killed the old man—with it—evidently just dug up, and still thickly crusted with blood and grey-hairs—grasped tight in his death clutch, in what would the Law have been more signally avenged, or society benefited, had Judge and Jury made short work of it, and the people read his 'last dying speech and confession,' ten days after his trial?

Heaven permitted the murderer to live, and, for a time, to safely conceal the damning evidence of his guilt; but Heaven's eye had marked the spot; and when The Accusing Spirit, through tortures of mind unspeakable, made him, of his own accord, go and dig it up again; and then, unable to move a step



further, for the paralysing dread that came over him, give up the ghost, with it in his grasp, held forth to the world, as it were, with his own red right hand, with

I AM THE MURDERER

stamped on it, in blood-written characters intelligible to all mankind—was that no punishment? no lesson of retribution to take to heart, and profit by? Though the hangman was cheated of his dues, and the chaplain of his condemned sermon, and the sheriffs of their ghastly procession! was not Heaven vindicated? was not the red right-hand brought, by its own sense of sinfulness, to cry, in its misery, '*Thou art my Judge, O God! My flesh trembleth, for fear of Thee; I am afraid of Thy judgments; Thou hast brought fearfulness and trembling upon me, and overwhelmed me with an horrible dread!*'

And justice is satisfied, is it? when the culprit is caught, and condemned, and hanged out of hand, and his broken-neck given over to

his friends, and society relieved of the scandal of its own fearful falling off from the Original Image—in proportion to its return to which, if ever, will it see “the futility of looking to any but One Law,” as Arnold Grey would say, to bring mankind to the knowledge of their Ignorance, and, so, make them wise and good.”

But what said people of Ralph’s night visit to the Vicar, with the missing Two Hundred and Forty Pounds? which had always been a mysterious feature of the tragedy, and led many to infer that robbery was the motive; which view of the case went far to clear, in their opinion, those of the murdered man’s own house from any suspicions of having had a hand in it.

Heaven’s ways are indeed inscrutable! An irresistible determination to ‘clear himself,’ as Ralph expressed it, before he could take Betsy to the altar, as his wife, and ask the Vicar’s blessing on their union, made him, after his visit to his child’s grave, swear to God, ‘that he would never again put bread

into his mouth,' till he had confessed to an act, which, to use his own words again, 'was what had plagued him more than anything he had ever done in his life.' Had the money been in gold, instead of paper notes, the dates and numbers of which he knew were known at the County Bank, temptation would have been too strong for him many a time, when he was 'hard driven,' he confessed; but, as it was, there they were, just as he had picked them up out of the hole; and well it was for that 'new character' he had to gain, that conscience compelled him to make a clean breast of it when he did, *before* he discovered Joel Yorke's corpse in the pit, or he might have found it very difficult to persuade the world of the truth of his strange tale, especially known for a ruffian 'reprobate,' as he was, at the time of the murder, and his strange behaviour on several occasions when in liquor, and he let his tongue loose. "Yes the loving mercy of Heaven was in that, too," said Arnold Grey, "He could see it palpably manifested in all that had oc-

curred since the old man's slaughter, to the moment that it pleased God to bring his slayer to the self-sought public proclamation of his guilt, in a manner that must convince all men, with eyes to see and ears to hear—Whose ever watchful Eye it is that never sleeps, Whose undying Voice it is that, in the breasts of one and all, is more potent to stir to good, and lead from evil, than all the tortures of mind or body that human ingenuity ever invented, terrible howsoever—to make OMNIPOTENT that One Law *alone*, on the right understanding and faithful obedience to which, in all and through all, depends the fulfilment of an end, too great and glorious for blind man's finite conceptions, but which *will* come, when his lusts and vanities and vain glories will let him see, how to seek those things only which are good for his peace."

Yes, it was well for Ralph, and the new life, with Betsy his wife, they meant to lead, that he took back the 'wretched greasy bits of old bank paper' to the Vicar, in the way he did.

Heaven had been very merciful and very bountiful to Ralph, 'reprobate' as he was, and was especially so in this instance; for it shewed such evidence of the good seeds, which the Vicar had been so anxiously trying to sow in him, having fallen in not altogether unfruitful places, that soon the Rector of Lyncourt himself, stern disciplinarian as he was, lent an ear, when any of them told him, "how well and happy Ralph and Elizabeth Andrews were now! and how comfortably they were getting on!" And, before long, he was seen, with Mrs. Stern and Lady Gracechurch, standing talking with Betsy at her gate; shortly after which, it got about,—and how Roland and Mary Gray smiled, well pleased!—"that Betsy Andrews had twelve new shirts to make, all with her own hands, for Mr. Gracechurch, who was going to be married to Miss Annie Walcot—as soon as Sir Hugh was quite recovered from the dreadful bullet-wound in his face, which had laid him up for six weeks,—and was terribly particular always about his shirt fronts and his wristbands and collars,

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that they were of the finest quality, and without spot or blemish ! and stitched, as no one could stitch them so well in the parish, if she chose, as Betsy Andrews."

But, though Ralph's possession of the missing notes was satisfactorily accounted for, and he and the public shook hands on that score, Ralph must explain what he meant by those 'lies,' as he called them, that he indulged in on several occasions, when tipsy, at the expense of public curiosity, no less than his own established character for *veracity*. And thus Ralph accounted for it:—"When he was drunk, then what he had found in the pit always ran uppermost in his mind, and he didn't care whether anybody knew whether he had the money or not; and he hadn't forgotten—it wasn't likely—how his mother was turned out of the cottage in Holly Lane; and what looking chap it was he saw coming out of the Copse, that night the old man was knocked over; and so he didn't mind what he said, for he hated that Joel Yorke, though he had given him money to go to Auckland, and that was

only to get rid of him, because very likely he caught sight of him in the pea-field, after he had been and hidden the hammer and the money, in different holes; but, all the same, he owed no spite to Mr. Roland, who had always been kind to him, and when he met him, didn't look black at him, as some of the others did, but always had a good word to say to him, and the Vicar, too, and Miss Mary; and so he wouldn't say nothing more in the court, when he was lugged up at the Jolly Cocks, except 'it was all his lies;' and now that was the truth of it, and he couldn't, and he wouldn't say no more about it, if they plagued him ever so."

The fact is, Ralph was getting a little saucy! The *mens conscia recti*, and a clear score at 'the shop' had no doubt something to do with it; but, more than all, the recollection of the past, with its sins and sorrows at an end, and the Vicar's, and Roland's, and Mary's "well done!" to both him and Betsy, when they had the good fortune to extraordinarily please them occasionally, carried

Ralph's head so erect through the village, and everywhere else, and brought the colour back so to Betsy's cheeks, that the neighbours, some of them, said "they were proud ! and would be spoilt, like all pet sheep were, who had strayed from the fold, and come back again, when they couldn't do better."

But Ralph looked up, all the same, and walked as bold and firm on his legs as the Vicar did. And soon it became quite the fashion, both in Millford and Lyncourt, for the men labourers to copy Ralph, and the neatest and tidiest and best ordered and happiest of their wives to compete with Betsy—in making home the 'sweetest' of all spots on earth, to their husbands, and, as far as was possible, carrying the same charming roses of health and content in their cheeks ; and though it is far from our design to depict Millford, as a pattern of a parish, to the disparagement of its neighbours—this may be said of it with truth, that its Pastor is very proud of his fold-full ! and the fold-full are no less proud of their Pastor !



And with regard to the Rector, we have no space left to record any one of the many earnest conversations that he and the Vicar had together, on Arnold Grey's forthcoming grand scheme for 'Making God's Law, Rightly Taught And Administered, The Only Means For Regenerating Mankind;' but we know for certain that the Rector gave in, on more than one point, touching the insufficiency of the penal code, however enforced, to suppress vice and preserve the peace. Joel's Yorke's end had deeply affected him! and he went so far as to say, "He hoped the Vicar would not fail to cite that remarkable case, among others, in his new work, with his own comments thereon, when he treated, *seriatim*, on that very important social subject—The Necessity For The Abolition Of Capital Punishments."

And, now, how came Sir Hugh off, after the Coroner's verdict of Justifiable Homicide, which returned him to his afflicted family, if not a much older, a very much wiser and better man? It can hardly be said, with flying colours. There was far more for him to be

ashamed of, than to glory in. And ashamed he was ! and deeply grieved ! to have it always staring *him*, too, in the face, that he had shed the blood of a fellow creature—for why ? and for what ? Because of pride, and folly, and extravagance, and rash acts, to keep them going, and the consequent pressing troubles in their train ; and, then, still rasher acts, and angry passions that would not be restrained, but set at naught all human protests, and seemed to defy both God and man ; till brought face to face with The Accusing Spirit, strong within him—“ O God ! ” he, also, cried on his bed of anguish, “ *Thou* art my Judge ! *Thy* judgments have brought me here ! I feared not what man could do unto me, but *Thou* hast laid me low ! ”

And gathered round him, those who most loved him, heard those cries, and among them was the Vicar.—“ And now,” he said to Clement, when he got him alone, “ you, too, are making all sorts of noble resolutions for the future ? wherefore, may I be permitted, as one of your trustees, under your Aunt Agatha’s

will, to ask one question? In a few days you will be entitled to your Legacy of Five Thousand Pounds, with accumulations—are we to be released from our Trust, or not?”

Clement smiled; and taking a new crisp Bank of England note, value Ten Pounds sterling, from his pocket-book,—while Roland, and Mary, and Mabel, and Aunt Poynts, who slipped in furtively from the lawn, went into a corner, to regale themselves on his “heroic triumph over his enemies,” as he called it,—placed it calmly in the Vicar’s hand.

“Very good,” said the Vicar, smoothing it out on his knee; “but —”

“I think it stipulates Ten in the will, please your reverence?” demanded Clement, turning to Roland, with grave courtesy.

Roland bowed.

“To be the fruit of my labour, too—I clearly understand that to be imperative, your reverence?”

“Indispensable!”

“Will your reverence”—still addressing Roland, “be pleased to read aloud this short

and comprehensive epistle from Paternoster Row, which will be a sufficient voucher, I trust, for the little receipt in full that your sweet sister has been kindly helping me to have ready for my highly esteemed Trustees, when, in a few days, I shall trouble them to stump up, according to law?"

"Certainly—and Roland read as follows:—

"Messrs. Biggman and Littlewhit present their compliments to Mr. Clement Walcot, and, though the market is at present glutted with poetry of an unremunerative description, which calls for considerable caution before undertaking the publication of another Epic Poem, of the pretensions of 'The Queen Of The Isles,' so kindly offered them by Mr. Clement Walcot, they are induced, by many germs of high merit they find in it, and which, if cultivated, may, they think, blossom into riper fruits, to at once offer him £25 for the copyright; a very inadequate sum, Messrs. Biggman and Littlewhit are aware, for the

evident pains and labour bestowed on the Poem, but as much as, in the present overstocked state of the book-market, they feel justified in risking on it, with so many other similar works on their hands.

“In the event of Mr. Clement Walcot’s acceptance of the above, Messrs. B. and L. will do themselves the pleasure of remitting him a cheque forthwith.”

The Vicar winked :—“ And this is one of the Ten-pound notes, is it, for ‘ The Queen Of The Isles ? ’ ”

To which Clement Walcot, the author, vouchsafing only a slight inclination of the head, Roland, though smiling, pale and thoughtful, and, to judge by the deep cloud on his brow, with that at heart which left little joy for other thoughts, rose, and taking Clement’s and Mabel’s right hands in his, “ Know any of you here present,” said he, with glistening eyes, and a throat so full that it was a little while before he could go on, “ any just cause or impediment why these two, Clement Walcot

and Mabel Yorke, spinster, should not, if so it please them, be affianced man and wife?"

"Not a word? Very well then," smiled the Vicar—after allowing a good half-minute, for any doubts, or scruples, or reservations, or regrets aunt Poynts might entertain about it; "as you all seem so agreed, and as this," holding up the note for Ten Pounds, "really appears to be a genuine transaction, and I can well fancy what brow-sweating work it must be to write anything of an Epic, in six books, that will, now-a-days, fetch £25, cash—enough to make anyone, but a poet born, perspire to think of it,—on Wednesday next, I think, nay, I may say, I feel sure, the trustees, under aunt Agatha's will, should nothing occur to prevent, will be in a position to pay over to the legatee in question, the sum or sums held by them in trust, for him; and then," grasping the offered hands of the happy twain in his, "Heaven bless you both! bless you, in proportion as you merit His gifts, and make a good use of them, not for yourselves only,

but ever to His praise and glory. And now, Roland Yorke and Mary Grey, stand forth," and the Vicar's voice faltered a little.—

"Dear me!" cried Mary, clinging tight to Roland's arm, as they obeyed the summons without hesitation,—though Mary changed colour so from white to red, and red to white, that anyone would have thought something awful was about to happen to them,—“dear me! what are you going to do with us? to separate us for ever?”

“Let him try if he can?” smiled Roland, with a look at her of such fondness! that—

“Oh, self-willed as that, are you both?” said the Vicar, clutching an arm of each.—“Go—go—then—and—and take your own course—only mind, if you repent it, don't come whimpering and whining to me, for if you do,”—but what else was on Arnold Grey's lips to say, evidently aunt Poynts thought he had no voice for just then; so, coming to the rescue, she linked an arm in his; and now wanting to have a word or two, all to herself, in his ear, led him out for a little walk round

the garden—and on they kept talking together till twilight.

Among other matters of grave interest to them both, which, now that there were to be two marriages in the families of the Yorkes and Walcots and Greys, would bind them together in closer bonds of amity and affection than ever, nothing pressed on the Vicar's mind more than the, at first, deadening effect that Joel's terrible self-confession of who murdered his father, had on Roland; and even now, after the lapse of weeks, it deeply concerned him, to see the settled gloom that, spite of all their endeavours, hung over everything he said and did; and there were times, when though Arnold Grey was face to face with him, from whom he hid nothing, he sat so abstracted, so entirely absorbed in his own sad reflections, that all argument seemed lost on him, and not even Mary, on whom he doted, could draw more than a faint smile from him; when, burying his face in his hands, as if the thought of something passing through his brain were too much for him, and he was



overwhelmed with shame and misery, "Oh, if the burning tears would but have burst out, that were choking him, how glad Mary would have been!" But even that solace came not. And soon Mary's cheeks grew pale, too, as well as his; and then, and not till then, was Roland aroused to "How selfish and unkind it was of him, to be buried so in himself—in a dreadful past, which paralysing his best energies, left the present work he had to do, undone; and then, what hope was there for him, for the future, of his ever holding his head up again but in bearing his yoke meekly, and bowing to the all-wise judgments of his God?"

This Mary ventured to whisper in his ear one day, when look, or say, or do what she would, despair was in his every answer to her loving efforts—not that cheerful submission, and acting up to, 'Thy Will Be Done,' which he was always preaching the indispensable necessity of to others, in affliction. And he raised his face from his hands, and looking earnestly at her—if *he* could not weep, *she* could,—and the torrent tore through his heart,

and bursting every bond, he caught her to his bosom, and mingling his tears with hers—from that hour, though the cloud on his brow never quite left it, he seemed to look up again to Where he had always, till of late, relied for aid, and strength, and patience and compassion, under every trial, and never failed to find them.

And all this was no less deeply interesting to Aunt Poynts than to the Vicar; for who loved Mary more than Mabel, and who loved Mabel, with all her ‘innocent freedoms,’ as the Colonel called them, more than Auntie?

“Yes, indeed,” agreed the Vicar to something Auntie dear said to him, ‘about the condign way in which Providence had brought Joel Yorke’s guilt to light;’ “what can be a more signal proof, that ‘He is about our path, and watches all our ways, and, in His own good time, will unveil the things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts?’”

“It seems incredible!” observed Aunt

Poynts, feeling her cheeks lose their colour at the thought of it; "incredible! that a child could raise his arm to strike down his parent?"

"It does," replied the Vicar; "till you know how the depravity of man's heart, the prey to some all-absorbing and uncontrollable passion, can plunge him into the most fearful excesses."

"Yes, I suppose that lies at the bottom of it—the unbridled passion, the mad impulse of unrestrained lusts, which, to gratify themselves, will do anything, no matter how wicked?"

"That is it—mad impulses, inordinate lusts, ungovernable passions, which, kept in check by no moral-power, are swift to shed blood or do anything else that is dreadful, to effect their end;" and drawing a small note book from his breast-pocket, in which he was accustomed to dot down any passages he might meet with in the writings of men qualified to be teachers of their age, and that struck him as worthy to be remembered:—"Here is something I came across the other day, so much to the purpose

of what we are talking of, that I made special note of it," said the Vicar, "and will read it to you, if you please :—

‘ Healthy motives and healthy temperaments do not furnish many victims for romance of any kind, high or low. It is the unnatural strength of what is purely mental disease which produces that tremendous exhibition of power, of a certain kind, which is found in those tragic scenes in domestic life, which occasionally startle the world. The madman is stronger than the sane man. It is when some fascination has worked on a man, and endowed some object with an absolute supremacy, and when his mind is completely carried away and drained into the excrescence, as it were, of one swollen passion, that the greatest degree of mere animal strength is arrived at. He can then do anything he likes ; nothing deters him ; he is beyond all faltering. It is easy for a man to enjoy the quiet society of his neighbours and all kinds of common-place pleasures, so long as he has no other particular craving to haunt and agitate him, no torment-

ing want, nothing to create a void within, and make him feel empty and hungry, as long as that void is not filled. But then comes a turn, when a prize, lovely or glittering, presents itself, and converts into a sandy waste this tame every day land of milk and honey; a sight has met his eye, a chord is struck, a sense is awakened, a new and fatal discovery is made, the powers of fascination have thrown their spells over him, and a soul that was free a minute before, is captive and enthralled.'

"How true!" exclaimed Aunt Poynts.

'No human mind has an immunity from the dangers of such attacks; every one is exposed to the chance of some powerful fascination; whatever be the texture of his mind, coarse or refined, that of an angel or that of a brute—he is exposed to it, as being man. Now, then, he finds it impossible to lead the same quiet life—he cannot enjoy the old pleasures with the same zest as before, there is a restless craving for something beyond. He will have this new absorbing prize or nothing; and now, when his resolution is thus made, if events

work well, and with him, there will be a romance. In short, all the pleasures and happiness of life go for nothing, unless a particular treasure is possessed. And what is this covetous determination to attain its end but a gross mental disease—a mind impassioned, enthralled, romantic, demoniacal, atrocious, and miserable ?

“Don’t that express Joel Yorke’s case exactly?” added the Vicar.

“Yes ; and to think,” rejoined Aunt Poynts, “how cunning those ‘diseased minds’ are, in the midst of their madness—the disguise he put on when he went to the pit, don’t that shew how under a certain amount of control the most morbid mind can be, when self is in danger?”

“True ; and, therefore, how sinful and wrong it is to give the morbid mind no time for self-correction and saving its soul alive. His mother used to call *him*, her eldest born, ‘the sweetest babe on earth !’ Whose fault was it that he turned out such a monster ? And the law was to deal with him, if he

broke any of the statuteable commandments. Much he cared for the law, and, yet, he read the newspapers, and heard of how men, and women, and youngsters sometimes of seventeen were hung up by the neck for being wilful and wicked. What good did it do him? He put down the journal, and went and brained his own father. 'Oh, has he done that? says the law; where is he? let us have him, and we'll put a stop to him pretty quick!' Yes, yes, that will put a stop to him no doubt; and to all need of caring any further about a reprobate rascal like he is, or what becomes of his soul? 'But he will have a minister of the gospel with him to the last.' Oh, for how long? 'From his entrance into the 'condemned cell,' if he chooses, till the drop falls.' No more time than that to prepare for heaven? Why it takes a whole life-time, with the best of us, to make ready the fitting garment wherein to appear there."

"My dear friend!" applauded Aunt Poynts, "you have taken up the good work, in all humility of spirit and right mindedness, and

will not easily lay it down again ; and all Christian hearts unanimously wish you God speed ! And now, to turn to other themes—a year will elapse, I suppose, before these young folks will be made as happy in each other as this world can look for ?”

The Vicar sighed.

“ Ah, come when it will, there is little joy, truly, in losing those we love. But Roland says he will make Millford his home ; and when *you* may no longer be its Vicar, *he*, with God’s blessing, will be ; till when, after they have travelled into ‘ Dark-Lands,’ as he calls them, for a year or two, with Clement and Mabel for companions—for I hear they have already decided it between them—they mean to settle down peacefully in the old spot ; where, though they will be reminded sometimes of things to sadden them, they will also, by kissing the Hand that chastises them, find joys in abundance to be grateful for.”

“ Yes, yes, joys indeed !” said the Vicar, brightening with the fresh gush of future hopes that came over him ; “ and if Roland



carry out what he seems to have fixed his mind on—you know what I allude to?"

"Pulling down Yorke House?"

"Yes, and erecting, on its ruins, an Asylum Institution For The Recovery Of The Lost, on a scale worthy of his means—" and Arnold Grey's chest heaved,—“tell me, will not that be a grateful offering? and putting out to rich interest the wealth of Yorke House?"

"All of which, by Joel dying intestate, descends, does it not, in equal shares to his brother and sister?"

"No—the real property, held in fee simple, as the lawyers call it, comes to Roland, but there is somewhere about Three Hundred and Fifty Thousand Pounds, personalities, Brockett says, and that will be divided between them."

"Upon my word! Miss Yorke—it is time almost we sent her to school, to learn mother tongue, with a Hundred and Fifty Thousand all her own, to do just as she likes with, and snap up Auntie dear, if she's in one of her tan-trums? But she shall find that Aunt

Poynts is not going to be put down by anyone."

"No, nor Arnold Grey either, if he thinks he is doing right. So we may as well go in now and let them all know it, in case—reckoning without their host—they are getting too happy."

"By the bye, there will be a life lease of the Rookery now, I suppose; and, as soon as Annie is married, no end of wholesome reforms to make that, too, a 'happy land?'" .

"Oh, yes! And I shouldn't wonder if that deep scar on the Knight's handsome face does him more good, every time he looks at himself in the glass, than if the Bacon And Cabbage Bubble had not burst, and he was rolling in riches."

"He told me but yesterday, while the tears were in Lady Walcot's eyes, 'that no wound'—and he shewed me three—'that he had ever received in action, should he treasure the memory of so much as that one on his cheek; for two reasons, first, because it was evident he had faced his enemy, and secondly, because

the lesson it had taught him made him not only ten thousand times a wiser but also a million times better looking fellow, in his own eyes, than he ever was."

"He said that did he," laughed the Vicar. "Then there are hopes of him. By far the most sensible speech I ever heard from his lips. When we glory in Heaven's marks of merciful wrath on us, then may we be sure, ugly and deformed and disfigured as we may be, we are nearer the Original Image in which we were made; for what are all His chastenings, but to bring us back to that High Standard, our wilful departure from which has made us the wretched slaves to sin that we are?"

\* \* \* \*

A word or two, by way of postscript. On re-visiting Yoxminster some three years after the discovery of who murdered Mr. Yorke, we found the masons and carpenters hard at work, on the site where stood Yorke House and its garden and the three old tumble-down houses beside it for upwards of two centuries, fast bringing to completion, at the sole cost of the Revd. Mr. Roland Yorke, 'Thè Asylum For

The Recovery Of The Lost,' of which the Vicar made such jubilant mention to Aunt Poynts at the close of our story. Nothing could be in better taste than the whole design and execution in all its features and departments. Utility had evidently been the aim of the architect rather than display; and as the Vicar looked up at it from the road, he might well feel proud of his work! for who but he had laid the foundation stone of it, and watched it day by day with parental satisfaction, growing to its full beauty under his own eye?

And beside him were Mr. and Mrs. Roland Yorke, and Mr. and Mrs. Clement Walcot, to the full as much interested in all the various exciting details as he was himself; while, a pace or two behind them, old Nanny and Nelly, arm in arm, were "wondering what the poor old gentleman, Mr. Roland Yorke, would say to it all, if he could look up out of his grave and see the home of his father swept for ever away in that manner?"

It was a moving sight! and we felt sure, knowing to Whose glory and honor and

praise it was dedicated, that the Good Work must prosper. Not a passer by but hailed it with all their hearts, and wished it God-speed!—and the prayers of a people are very potent helps. The Vicar was in high glee! Everything was going well with him. His children, as he called them all, had returned to their country, and their homes, none the less contented because they had been wanderers for a while. And they had come back, to cluster round him and make his last days happy! and who was there that could not see the joy in his gentle generous smiles, which hailing all he met, were reflected back so, that it made you happy, too, to look at him; and even the little boys and girls in the street would stand in his way, to get a nod.

And to judge by the now scarcely more than pensive cloud that shadowed Roland's brow, he had found somewhat of solace somewhere from his sorrows; and when we observed who was leaning on his arm and looking up into his face with those loving trustful eyes, we were at no loss to understand

from whence his new strength and faith and patience and thankfulness had come. He had evidently made a wise choice in choosing Mary Gray for his wife; and there appeared to be no doubt on Mary's mind, that Roland also "suited *her* very well." And as for Clement and Mabel, "if they were not, as Clement declared, the happiest couple, next to Roland and Mary, on earth, at all events they could tell of no wish ungratified," and that was saying as much for a poet, as could reasonably be expected. So that what with Mrs. Roland's "beautiful boy!" in his cradle at home, "the image of his father;" and Mrs. Clement Walcot's "lovely girl!" also in long frocks, "the *fac-simile* of her mother;" together with the Vicar's grandfatherly pride! and Auntie's exultant joy! and Annie Gracechurch's "darling twins!!" the counterparts of both papa and mamma; to say nothing of Nanny and Nelly's snug cot together, of Roland and Mabel's building and fitting up and furnishing, and ample and over, from one source or another, to 'keep the pot boiling;' and last, but not least in our esteem,

Ralph and Betsy's tears of delight ! when coming through the churchyard together one day, there were the Head and Foot Stone, with its appropriate inscription, to little Bessie's grave, put up, as if by magic, and not a farthing to pay !—what with one cause for content or another, "if they are not happy," we said musingly to ourselves, as we retraced our steps homewards over the pleasant old meadows, "this life has nothing more to give them—they must look for it in Heaven."

And as we re-entered the town by the old turnpike, there was Sir Hugh Walcot coming leisurely across the heath on Daredevil, at a pace somewhat different to what it used to be in days gone by. Then it was nearly always a hand-gallop they were going at, but now it was a steady quiet walk ; though Daredevil, as well as his Master, looked every now and then, with the freshening breeze, as if they would like very well to have a good scamper across country, come any fair plea for it. And pulling up, as we came side by side, The Knight Of The Ugly Scar, as they called him,

hailed us joyously ! and chatting along over the heather, we fell into old themes. And, among other things we were specially curious that day to hear about, we questioned him concerning The New Epic—no sort of tidings of which had reached us for many a day ? Whereupon he gathered up the veins, and waving his hand to us, as Daredevil bounded away again as of old:—"It won't appear," he shouted out, "so they say in The Row, till the public know how to appreciate their Poets rather better than they do now." But "hallo, stop a moment, there's something else we wanted to ask you," bringing Daredevil to a halt:—"How about The Bacon And Cabbage Company ?" we ventured to enquire, on the strength of old friendship ; "they say poor Simon Sniggs was terribly let in by it !" "Yes, yes, by that consummate rascal Jenkins ! who ought to have had every bone in his skin broken ! atrocious ! abominable ! You've heard, though, eh, haven't you, what's up now ? Not going to catch old birds with chaff, eh ? Not heard ? By George ! now's your time



then ! Yes, as true as you're standing there—they're talking—Podge and Jenkins—and by Jove ! I don't see why it shouldn't pay—talking of—you'd never guess if you tried till doom's day—a Grand Metropolitan Mutton Chop And Mashed Potato Company—not bad that, eh ?—good bye !” with which off again, so were we—fully resolved, as it is a dish we are fond of, to watch the share-lists and have nothing to do with it, unless Podge and Jenkins could induce the Directors to entertain the, to us, indispensable necessity of a pickled onion, in conjunction, or, at all events, having the plates always rubbed with a shalot.

Turning into ‘The Dolphin,’ we met Jonathan Brockett, our old school-fellow, who, though “fagged almost to death,” promised faithfully to let us know, in due time, how The New Asylum prospered ;—about twelve months after which we got the following—“Touching our ‘Little Yoxminster Attempt,’ as the Vicar calls it, it is A Great Success !”





